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Lee

WAYWARD ANNE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The World and Delia
The Girl and the Man
Only Betty
The Other Sara
Mollie Deverill

Boston: Dana Estes & Co.

Wayward Anne

By

~~Curtis Yorke~~ Mrs S. R. Lee

"As the dead year is clasped by a dead December,
So let your dead sins with your dead days lie.
A new life is yours, and a new hope. Remember,
We build our own ladders to climb to the sky."

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

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Company ∴ Publishers
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F

WAYWARD ANNE

CHAPTER I

"Take what is; trust what may be.
That's life's true lesson."
ROBERT BROWNING.

THEY found out afterwards that they had both lived in the same block of flats for nearly seven months. But the first time they became mutually conscious of one another's existence was on an afternoon of early February — dull, wet, and muggy, as early February afternoons are apt to be.

He stepped into the lift a few seconds after she did — their respective flats were on the top floor — and a small Irish terrier who accompanied him promptly made a friendly jump at Anne, and did serious damage to the contents of a paper bag she held. The bag contained eggs, and the result was disastrous — not only to the eggs, but to the skirt of Anne's gown.

The owner of the dog expressed sincere regret,

and reprimanded the culprit severely. It was only when they got out of the lift that he — and she — saw the deplorable state of her dress.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed in a dismayed tone. "I am most awfully sorry. It really is too bad."

Anne was feeling too much annoyed to trust herself to speech. So with a slight, almost imperceptible bow, and an angry light in her eyes, she walked swiftly along the corridor leading to her door. Two doors faced one another at the extreme end of the corridor, and Anne's was on the right-hand side.

As she put her latchkey into the lock, she became aware of something pawing her dress; and looking down, she saw the mischief-making terrier gazing up at her repentantly, as though begging for forgiveness. And to her surprise and annoyance, she saw that the dog's master was close behind him.

She raised her head rather haughtily, and said in a voice of iced sweetness:

"Pray do not make any further apologies. I can assure you they are quite unnecessary."

But, somewhat to her discomfiture, the man merely raised his hat in silence, opened the opposite door with a key, and went in, followed by the terrier.

Anne shut her door with careful gentleness,

because she felt so very much inclined to bang it, and said viciously under her breath:

"What a singularly disagreeable person!"

After which manifestly unjust remark, she tore off her skirt in what an old aunt of hers would have called a "tantrum," and took it into a small, cosily-furnished bedroom. Then, having lit a candle, she examined the garment dispassionately. It certainly presented rather a hopeless appearance; and Anne rolled it up into a ball, and threw it into a corner.

"So like the malignancy of events," she murmured. "So like my usual luck that I should have put on that particular skirt to-day. So like my usual luck that I should have come up in the lift to-day, of all days — that I should have chosen to carry six eggs in a bag, instead of having them sent home as usual. I shall have to send that skirt to be cleaned. Five and sixpence — at least. And four eggs smashed — at twopence each — eightpence. Six shillings and twopence in all. And just when I was so particularly hard up. Oh, my opposite neighbor, and my opposite neighbor's dog — how I hate you both!"

An hour or two later, when her simple evening meal was over, she sat down in a basket-chair beside the gas-stove in her sitting-room, and, with a writing-pad upon her knee, began to

scribble rapidly with a stylographic pen. Every now and then she stopped, frowned, twirled her pen thoughtfully in the air, and went on again.

As the timepiece struck the half-hour after eight, the sharp whirr of the electric bell made the girl start. She was not a person of nerves as a rule, but her principal female character was passing the night in a haunted room, and Anne was apt to identify herself with her dream-children.

She rose, and having opened the door, became aware that her opposite neighbor was standing on the door-mat. His own door was open, and from somewhere within came an aggrieved and resentful whining, varied by short, sharp barks.

"I think this letter is for you, Miss Stafford," he said, with a grave bow. "It has been put into my post-box by mistake, and I opened it before I noticed the address. I am exceedingly sorry."

"Oh, thank you," replied Anne, in a far from cordial tone.

As the other turned towards his own door he paused, and said hesitatingly:

"I hope you will allow me to express once more my regret at the mischief my terrier has done. I have scolded him severely, and tied him up, which is the deepest form of disgrace that

can possibly be inflicted upon him. So I hope you will forgive us both."

There was something rather winning about the speaker's personality, Anne conceded unwillingly. She was not quite sure whether it was his face, or his voice, or his smile, that was so indescribably what women call "nice." So she replied, with a touch of softening in her tone:

"Please don't punish your dog on my account. I dare say he only meant to be friendly. I am very fond of dogs, and I suppose they know it. After all, I ought not to have carried eggs in a paper bag when I had on that particular skirt."

Just then a triumphant cascade of barks announced that the terrier had released himself; and presently he dashed across the corridor, trailing his lead behind him. He careered madly round his master, and then round Anne, and with a final yelp of delight at his freedom, rushed past Anne, and through the little hall into her sitting-room, where, by some sad mischance, his lead twined itself round the legs of the spidery table, whereon stood a lighted china lamp.

The next thing was a crash, and semi-darkness, only relieved by the glow of the gas fire.

Anne was on her knees picking up the pieces, when she heard the terrier's master say:

"Let me help you."

He had brought in his own lamp, and as he spoke he set it down in a position of security on a round table in the middle of the room.

"Thank you," said Anne. Then she added, laughing uncertainly: "Your dog is evidently determined to do mischief to my belongings."

"It is awfully annoying," said her companion. "Boxer seems possessed by some evil spirit to-day. I'm afraid your lamp is hopelessly smashed. Have you another?"

"No. I can use a candle for to-night."

"Nonsense! I shall leave this one. I have several. Now let me see to all this. I have shut the dog up securely this time."

Here the door banged itself shut with a noise that made Anne jump.

"Your kitchen window must be open," observed the young man calmly, as he swept the débris into a newspaper with the hearth-brush. "By the way, it's a good thing this was a safety lamp, or the whole place would have been in a blaze."

When order was restored, Anne said gratefully:

"Thank you very much indeed. Won't you sit down for a minute?" she added, on the impulse of the moment, and yet half hesitatingly. Her gesture, however, as she motioned the young

man to a chair, was almost royal, and amused him a good deal.

Anne was quite a little woman, and very slender, but there was a certain air of queenliness about her movements and her general bearing at times that rather impressed most people.

Her visitor was not easily impressed, however. So, as I have said, he was rather amused. He himself was big and broad-shouldered, with a dark, clean-shaven face that was more remarkable for distinction than for any beauty of feature.

He seated himself in a fairly comfortable chair, and looked round the tiny room in swift appreciation. Anne was leaning back in a corner of the couch. To the casual observer — had there been one — they might have known one another for years.

"Certainly Boxer has distinguished himself to-day," Anne's visitor said. "I feel, in a way, responsible for his misdeeds. Is the gown irretrievably spoilt?" he added, after a few silent seconds, during which Anne had mentally decided that she was rather glad than otherwise that he was her opposite neighbor, and had freely forgiven Boxer his works of destruction.

She was a young woman given to sudden likes and dislikes, and Boxer's master had found fa-

vor in her rather critical eyes. At his question she smiled somewhat ruefully.

"I shall have to send it to be cleaned," she said.

"It's really too bad," he answered. Then, in a different tone: "May I introduce myself? Misfortune seems to have brought us near enough for that. My name is Carroll — Brian Carroll. And, as you have doubtless surmised, I am your opposite neighbor. You are Miss Stafford, I know."

"How do you know?" she asked. "I wondered when you handed me the letter. It might not have been for me."

"I have fairly good eyesight," he answered. "And there are certain bulky, oblong packets which, I regret to say, are occasionally like homing pigeons, and do not usually accommodate themselves to private post-boxes. A few evenings ago, while taking one of these packets from the postman's hand, I unavoidably saw that he had disposed of all his letters, et cetera, excepting one packet of the kind I have described, and that it was addressed to Miss Stafford; and immediately afterwards he knocked — with what my charwoman calls the 'parcel-knock' — at your door."

"But I might not have been Miss Stafford," the girl answered, dimpling ever so little. "I

might have had a cousin, or a sister, or an aunt, living with me."

"No. I know there is not room for a cousin, or a sister, or even an aunt, in your flat," he answered calmly.

"How do you know what the size of my flat may be?" she asked, her face flushing somewhat.

"Because I looked over it when I was about to take mine. Therefore I know it has even one room less. But pardon me; of course, I have no right to make remarks as to the size of your flat. I live so much alone that I fear I am something of a savage at times."

"I live all alone, too," she said. "But I don't consider it necessary to be a savage."

"No, I dare say not. But you doubtless have friends. I have none. But no, I am wrong. I have one very faithful friend, whom I could ill spare. He is an Irish terrier, and his name is Boxer."

"Why have you no friends?" asked Anne, her tone somewhat abrupt.

"Oh, that is rather a long story," he answered quietly. He rose as he spoke, and with a grave bow went towards the door.

But Anne detained him with a slight, hesitating gesture of her upraised hand.

"One moment," she said, and her voice held a note of wistfulness. "You said something

about bulky, oblong packets being returned to you. Do you — are you a writer, too?"

"Yes," he answered, with a smile in his eyes that stopped short of his lips, "I write for one or two magazines. Sometimes they appreciate my efforts, and sometimes — they do not."

He had turned towards the room again as he spoke, and now stood looking down at her. It seemed to her that he was immensely tall.

"I write short stories," she said with a caught-back sigh. "But they always come back now. When I first came here I had two accepted, and thought I was on the road to fame and fortune. Now — I sometimes think seriously of giving it up altogether."

"It is always too soon to give up," he answered. Then he added: "Do you write under your own name?"

"Yes. And you?"

"No. My pen-name is Norman Stone."

Her eyes widened.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Are you Norman Stone? Why, I know your work quite well. And yet," she added reproachfully, "you tried to make me believe that you have manuscripts returned."

"But I can assure you it is true," he answered, smiling. "I had one returned, as I have told you, only a few evenings ago."

Just then the postman's "parcel-knock" made Anne jump.

"It is another," she said, with a despondent shrug — "another homing pigeon."

It was, apparently, and the man's eyes met the woman's in quick sympathy.

As they stood at the open door together a few seconds later, while the echo of the postman's quick footsteps died away, Carroll said, with some hesitation in voice and manner:

"I wonder if you would let me look at your manuscript? I will return it some time to-morrow or the next day."

"Oh, would you look at it?" she answered eagerly, her eyes lighting up. "It would be awfully kind of you. But I am afraid you will think it fearful rubbish."

"If I do I shall tell you," he replied, holding out his hand for the packet. "I can be very brutal on occasion."

But an hour or so later, when he had read the brief sketch that had been returned "with thanks" by the editor of a popular weekly, he found that it was not necessary to be brutal. On the contrary, the writer's style pleased him, though the plot was weak and hackneyed.

He was distinctly interested in this young neighbor who was alternately so queenly and so childish. No, not childish — child-like, rather.

He recognized the subtle difference. He fancied, too, that she might have rather winning ways on closer acquaintance. Yes, he was distinctly interested in her.

And yet he had long ago given up interesting himself in anything or anybody, he reflected gloomily. Why should he begin now?

Here Boxer laid a supplicating paw upon his knee, and thumped his tail excitedly on the floor.

"Well, old chap, what is it?" Carroll said, looking down at the animal with grave affection. "Time for your walk, eh? By Jove! so it is. I didn't think it was so late."

Anne, fastening up her bolt and chain for the night, heard the click of the opposite door and Boxer's subdued yelp of delight as he and his master passed along the corridor.

A queer sense of protection enfolded Anne as she listened to the firm, regular footsteps. She was foolish enough to pull aside the blind of the window in her sitting-room, and watch until the man and the dog came out of the doorway below. She liked the general appearance of her newly-discovered neighbor. She liked the set of his head, the width of his shoulders; she liked his eyes and his voice. She liked ——

"Anne Stafford, you are a fool," she told herself contemptuously.

And, twitching the blind into place again, she

turned back into the room, and put it in order for the night, folding up the dainty sofa-spread and covering up the smart cushions.

She was a long time in going to sleep that night. Her bed faced the window, which was open as far as it would go — the blind drawn up to the top. So that, as she lay, she could see the endless sea of house-tops and chimneys that stretched between her and the horizon. Every night she went to sleep with that dim panorama before her drowsy eyes. Even on the darkest nights there were little lights and landmarks that had become quite familiar to her. Last night it had been blurred with heavy rain. There had been other nights when it had been veiled in fairy-like, powdery snow. To-night it was touched into faint radiance by the light of a struggling and uncertain moon.

The hours wore on, and still sleep did not come. Anne made up her mind not to think of this new neighbor of hers.

"He has a dominating personality," she told herself firmly, "that is all. I must resist it."

So she thought resolutely of other things.

But in vain. Brian Carroll's strong features and steady eyes seemed to float before her mental vision with a persistence that exasperated her. For as a rule she was a fairly sensible young woman, and held her lighter nature well in hand.

"After all," she argued, "I am only thinking of him because he is going to read my story. It is only natural," she added, giving herself a little shake preparatory to turning over and going to sleep.

Next day, however, she thought about her literary neighbor hardly at all. For the morning's post brought her a letter from a firm of publishers who had read a short story of hers in one of the fourpenny-halfpenny magazines. They informed her that they were "willing to consider" a work from her pen. But they went on to say that, as she was as yet unknown in the book-world, they could only offer her the following terms:

The projected novel was to consist of not less than a hundred thousand words. If approved by their reader, they would publish it at an early date, and would pay the author a royalty of a penny per copy on all copies sold above three thousand. A postscript ran thus:

"We take it that you would not object to pay us the trifling sum of forty-two pounds to cover initial expenses."

I regret to say that this preposterous offer filled Anne's heart with triumphant, incredulous joy.

"At last — at last!" she whispered half aloud, with shining eyes and burning cheeks. A Lon-

don publisher had written to her asking her for "a work from her pen." She repeated the phrase again and again. Surely it was too good to be true.

Which of her stories had these discerning publishers read, she wondered? She had only had two accepted, as she had told Mr. Carroll. So it must either have been "Cicely's Chance" or "The Last Turning." She hoped it had been "The Last Turning." The other now seemed to her silly and sentimental. Still, the editor had paid her three guineas for it.

She read the letter over again. The name of the firm, Wiggins & Cramp, was unknown to her. The street, also, in which their office was situated was not a street that she had heard of. But these details seemed to her unimportant. The suggested payment of forty-two pounds, however, was a real obstacle. Nevertheless, something might be arranged. She had some old-fashioned jewelry which she knew was rather valuable.

Again, a royalty of a penny a copy did not seem much. But if the book were a success — and Anne resolved that it should be — it might sell by hundreds of thousands.

She sat leaning her chin on her hands, her elbows on the table. Her face was dimpled with a happy smile. She looked almost like a child.

"I must not seem too eager to accept," she soliloquized mentally. "It would spoil it."

Presently she rose and went to her writing-bureau, where she wrote a brief note to Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp.

"DEAR SIR" (it ran),

"I shall consider your offer of yesterday's date, and let you know my decision in a day or two. Yours truly,

"ANNE STAFFORD."

This seemed to Anne very business-like, and rather subtle. She would not post it until the late afternoon, she decided, or perhaps not until night. That would give them time to wonder if she were going to accept their terms or not, she thought, nodding her head wisely as she addressed the envelope.

This done, with a gleeful heart she hastened about her morning duties, and proceeded to set her little domain in order for the day. For her limited means did not admit of a servant. Indeed, her means ought not to have permitted the rent she paid for her flat. But, as she argued with herself — perhaps wisely — she preferred to "do without" many little luxuries, and live in a comparatively good neighborhood. She had a tiny income of her own, and hoped — oh

neophyte in literary quagmires! — to double, or even treble it by her pen.

She spent the early part of the afternoon in sketching out a plot for the forthcoming novel. Not one plot, but half a dozen, seemed to dance through her brain. The only difficulty was to choose. She felt more happy and hopeful than she had done for a long time. After all, the world was a good place, and talent was certain to be recognized at last, if one waited patiently.

The sun streamed in at the window, and fell across her writing-paper. She regarded it as a good omen, and gazed at it dreamily, leaning her chin in her hand.

After a time, possible plots faded into her mind's background, and Anne began to build air-castles.

Her book was written — published — had created a tremendous stir in the world of literature. The sales were enormous. Edition succeeded edition. Eager publishers were offering fabulous sums for her next novel. She was famous. Anne Stafford was a household word. And she was not only famous, but wealthy. She had left her flat, and now occupied a small but altogether delightful house in Mayfair. She had an electric brougham. She had a staff of abnormally perfect servants. Also she had a secretary — for her correspondence was overwhelm-

ing. Royalty itself had graciously pronounced her work to be remarkable — almost unique.

Of course, countless suitors had sought her in marriage, but she had steadily rejected them all. Even one whose face and figure spelt strength and distinction, and — well, really, who was not at all unlike her opposite neighbor.

As she realized this, her air-castle came down like the proverbial house of cards, and she jumped from her chair with a shrug of disapproval.

" How unlike me! " she said under her breath, and with flaming cheeks. " How horribly unlike me! My good fortune has turned my brain."

CHAPTER II

NEXT morning, as Anne was turning away from the window of an "antique" shop in Earlscourt Road, she almost ran into Carroll, who was coming in the opposite direction.

"Good-morning!" he said pleasantly.

"Good-morning!" she answered, holding out her hand. "This window has an invincible attraction for me."

"Yes, so it has for me," he replied. "I have picked up several really good bargains here."

"My bargains are barred by any price above half a crown," she said, laughing. "By-and-by, when I make my fortune by my pen, I shall launch out wonderfully. I love these queer old things. I make up all kinds of imaginary stories about them, and the people they belonged to."

"By the way, I have read your story," he said. "I think it is quite good. But there are one or two alterations I should like to suggest, if I may."

"I shall be very glad of any hints," she answered. "Though I may not have leisure for

short stories for a time. I have had the most wonderful piece of good fortune," she added, looking up at him with sparkling eyes.

"I am very glad," he answered. "May I hear details?"

But when she had told him he looked grave.

"I wonder if you would allow me to see the letter," he said slowly.

"Certainly, if you wish it," she answered, looking rather surprised at his evident lack of enthusiasm.

For a moment she actually wondered if he, the well-known "Norman Stone," could be jealous of the extraordinary success of a new-comer in his profession. But she put this flash of thought aside as unlikely. Happily he did not divine it.

"Then may I come in this evening about nine?" he said. "And I will bring your story, and give you my ideas upon it."

"Yes, do," she answered. "And please bring Boxer. I am sure he would like to come. I met him on the stairs to-day, and we had quite a pleasant conversation."

"That is very good of you," he said. "I shall bring him with pleasure."

As Anne partook of her solitary supper that evening, she rather took herself to task for the recklessness with which she had allowed this

unknown man to take the first steps towards comparative intimacy.

"It is not like me," she thought, "to be so frank and unreserved with strangers. But no one could possibly think of him as a man who would presume in the slightest degree. Whatever else he may be, he certainly is a gentleman. And he is interesting — distinctly interesting."

He came, accompanied by Boxer, at a few minutes past nine. And with dancing eyes, Anne produced the letter from Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp.

He perused it in silence, while Anne watched him with a demure, contented smile, and Boxer sat gazing stolidly at the glow of the stove.

After what seemed to Anne an unnecessarily long time, Carroll folded up the letter, and fitted it carefully into its envelope again.

"Well?" the girl said, somewhat impatiently.

He looked at her for a second or two without speaking, and an expression of mingled wonder and pity crept into his eyes. Then he said gently:

"But — surely you have not accepted this outrageous offer?"

Her face flushed.

"I have not accepted it yet. But, of course, I shall. It is the only time a publisher has of-

fered to take my work. I have written to say I shall consider their offer. I thought it more diplomatic," she added, with dignity.

Carroll successfully concealed a smile, realizing that it would be regarded as criminal — in the circumstances.

"It may mean anything," Anne went on, her voice trembling a little with suppressed excitement. "Don't you see? Suppose over a hundred thousand copies are sold. That would be, as nearly as I can calculate, about four hundred and sixteen pounds. And if I wrote three books a year — which I know I could — why, it would be considerably over a thousand pounds. And later on, they would, of course, give me much better terms. Why, I might make thousands a year! Don't you see?"

Carroll was silent for ten seconds or so. To check such appalling optimism seemed to him almost as heartless as to stick pins into a baby.

At last he said slowly:

"I don't think this firm — Wiggins Cramp — has any commercial or literary standing. The chances are that, so far from selling anything over three thousand copies of your book, they would most probably stop short at three hundred or so. They would then write to you, saying that the sales of the book had not come up to their expectations; therefore, in the meantime,

your royalties would be nil. A little later you would be informed that all demand for your book had ceased. And you would be minus forty-two pounds, and plus rather painful experience."

"I don't see why the sales of the book should stop short at three hundred," observed Anne, in an arctic voice that should have warned her companion that he was rapidly sinking into disgrace.

"No, you poor child, of course you don't. Innocent, newly-fledged authors never do understand these things."

"I am not such a newly-fledged author," Anne replied icily. "I have had two stories accepted.

"I know, I know!" he answered with praiseworthy gravity. "But, in short, I cannot allow you to be robbed of forty-two pounds — for it is nothing less than robbery — without warning you."

"You cannot allow me?" echoed Anne, sitting up very straight and stiff in her chair. "Pray remember, Mr. Carroll, that our acquaintance only dates from the day before yesterday."

"I know," he acquiesced. "But even an acquaintance of the day before yesterday may save a fellow-creature from obvious pitfalls."

"I think I am quite able to take care of myself, thank you," she replied, with a distinct flash in her very pretty brown eyes.

"Pardon me, but in this case you evidently are not," he said quietly.

He rose as he spoke, and laid the manuscript of her story on the table. Then he added:

"However, I am sorry if I have seemed to presume in offering unasked advice. Of course, as you have given me to understand, it is no business of mine. Come, Boxer."

Anne rose, too, exclaiming impulsively:

"But — I thought you were going to give me some hints about my story. Have you forgotten?"

He paused, and Boxer sat down again.

"Do you think you would be likely to take any hints?" he said, a shade of chill in his voice. "You have just given me a strong impression to the contrary."

"Well, you must admit that it is not cheering to have cold water thrown on one's darling hopes, just as they are on the point of being realized," she answered quickly.

"I quite admit that. But the offer you have just received from these — people could not possibly realize any hopes. Of course, if you have forty-two pounds that you have absolutely no use for, and want to get rid of, and if you decide

on making a present of it to Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp — well, I'm afraid that nothing I can say will prevent you."

"You remind me a good deal of an uncle of mine," she said, frowning. "He has just that disagreeable way of putting things. However, Mr. Carroll, I truly shall be very pleased if you will tell me what you would suggest about my story. Let us leave the other matter in the meantime."

He smiled slightly, and took up the little roll of closely-written sheets.

"It is the plot I object to," he said. "It has been done over and over again. And I can't say I am interested in either of the characters."

Anne flushed hotly.

"But you said you thought it quite good!" she exclaimed, looking at him with hurt, surprised eyes. "How can it be good if neither the plot nor the character-drawing is satisfactory? You must mean that it is altogether bad."

"No. Quite the contrary. Your style is very good, and your dialogue really clever. But I can see why the story was rejected. I'm afraid if I had been an editor I should have done the same."

"Then I had better tear it up," observed Anne shortly.

"No, I shouldn't do that. The dialogue could

be used in another story. But this plot will never do. It is hopeless."

"You are frank," said Anne, with a queer little laugh.

"But did you not want me to be frank?" he asked, looking down at her with grave eyes. "If I did not think your work had possibilities, I shouldn't have thought it worth while to give you anything but polite though tepid praise."

Anne was silent for a second or two, and turned over the pages of her despised literary baby with decided irritation.

"You are not encouraging," she said at last.

"On the contrary, I mean to be very encouraging. There is always room for a writer whose style and dialogue are as good as yours. But you must practise 'joining the flats' skilfully. You must not write on hackneyed lines. And you must 'get inside' your characters, so as to make them real and living. Otherwise the public won't take the faintest interest in them."

"I suppose — I ought to be very much obliged to you," said Anne slowly.

"I really think you ought."

"I dare say I should have been — the day before yesterday. But I fear that that letter has demoralized me. It has lifted me up to the giddy heights of ambition. And you — have ruthlessly dashed me down again."

"I am very sorry."

"No, no; you are not in the least sorry. And I am not sure that I want you to be. I dare say you are a blessing in disguise."

"As far as your writing is concerned, I am almost sure I am. I wish you would promise me to have nothing to do with the people — Wiggins & Cramp."

"I won't promise," was the half-defiant answer. "I very rarely make promises, because if I do I always break them."

"Very well, then. I'm afraid you must dree your own weird. I am speaking of what I know, remember."

"I shall remember. And if I come to grief — well, I shall only have myself to blame."

"That does not make repentance the sweeter. Good-night. If I can be of any service to you, please command me."

When Boxer and his master had gone, Anne sat for a long time with her head between her hands, thinking. But her thoughts were no longer jubilant. To speak vulgarly, the gilt was off the gingerbread.

And yet she felt sure that Mr. Carroll must be mistaken regarding the probable methods of Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp. She was certain that they were all right. And, on consideration, she had no manner of doubt that she could per-

suade them to let her defer the payment of the forty-two pounds until her first royalties were due.

She rapidly sketched a mental picture of these men who were to introduce her to success and fame. Mr. Wiggins, she fancied, would be short and rather stout, with a jovial face and a kindly smile. Mr. Cramp, on the other hand, she saw in her mind's eye as tall, spare, and stern-looking — not so taking in manner as Mr. Wiggins, perhaps, but, on a further acquaintance, possessing more sterling qualities.

All at once she made up her mind that she would interview them personally. Why not? Personal interviews were always more satisfactory. And she would be able to see at a glance, she told herself, whether the firm were one of standing or not.

Then she went to bed, and dreamed that Mr. Wiggins met her at the door of his office, ushered her into his private room, and said that he had prepared a crown of laurels with which he would decorate her at once.

She seated herself in a large chair, and Mr. Wiggins said blandly:

"Kindly remove the hat, please."

She glanced round quickly, and saw that she was in a dentist's surgery, and that a well-

known instrument of torture, partially concealed, gleamed in Mr. Wiggins' right hand.

"All the teeth must come out, I think," he said, with a terrible smile.

Anne struggled convulsively to rise. But, to her horror, she was tied to the chair.

From this absurd nightmare she awoke with a stifled cry, to find a storm of sleet driving in upon her from the open window. She got up and drew down the blind; then went to sleep again almost immediately.

CHAPTER III

THE following morning was bright and sunny, so Anne arrayed herself with care, and set out in search of Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp's office or offices.

She met Boxer on the stairs, and solicited his good wishes for her success. But he only vouchsafed a hurried though friendly wag of his tail and passed on. This was a trifling incident, but somehow it damped Anne's spirits.

A "Vanguard" was passing the end of the street. She caught it, and climbed to the top, where one front seat was vacant. Careering Cityward, with a keen east wind in her face, her momentary depression faded away.

She got down in Fleet Street, and after some inquiry found Glode Lane, and subsequently the number she was in search of. The offices of Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp were on the top floor, she found; and thither she ascended with a distinct sense of disillusion, holding her dainty skirts very high to avoid contact with the exceedingly dirty stairs. At last she stopped, rather out of breath, before a narrow, shabby

door, whereon the words "Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp" were painted in staringly new black letters on a ground glass background.

She waited for nearly a minute, for her heart was beating rather fast; then she turned the handle and went in.

Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp's office was a small room with one grimy window and an infinitesimal fireplace where a few red cinders struggled with a mound of white ashes. A cheap roller desk stood in one corner. Near it were half a dozen bookshelves filled with dusty, gaily-bound books. The rest of the furniture consisted of three chairs and a table littered with papers. A small, sandy-haired boy was seated on one of the chairs, munching a sausage-roll, and reading a penny novelette. His back was towards the door, and he was apparently unaware that it had opened.

But as Anne shut it and advanced into the room he turned and rose leisurely, whisking the novelette into one pocket of his jacket and the remains of the sausage-roll into the other.

"Is this the office of Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp?" inquired Anne, after casting an incredulous glance round the dismal place.

"Yes, miss. Take a chair, miss," answered the boy cheerfully. As he spoke he dusted a

chair with a piece of brown paper and placed it behind Anne.

But Anne ignored it.

"I should like to see either Mr. Wiggins or Mr. Cramp," she said rather uncertainly.

"Mr. Cramp's having his lunch, miss. He'll most likely be back in about half an hour. He's lunching early to-day, on account of having to go into the country. Did you wish to see him about anything particular, miss?"

"Yes. I wish to see him about a letter I had regarding the publication of a — a novel. I wrote to him the day before yesterday."

"Oh! What name, miss, please?"

"Miss Stafford," was the haughty answer. "If Mr. Cramp does not return for some time," she continued, "can I see Mr. Wiggins?"

A curious expression crossed the lad's shrewd, almost elderly face. "Oh, well — I'm Wiggins," he said jauntily. "I'm not exactly a partner, but the guv'nor's given me an interest in the business."

As he spoke a subdued note of importance crept into his shrill young voice.

Anne gazed straight before her in stony silence, while Mr. Wiggins searched among a pile of letters on the table.

"Ah, this is yours, isn't it?" he said, holding up Anne's "diplomatic" note of two days ago.

Anne looked at him.

"Do you mean to tell me that you — a little boy — are the Mr. Wiggins of this firm?" she said slowly.

"I'm Wiggins, sure enough," he said. Then, in a different tone he added: "But here's the guv'nor himself."

If Anne had any illusions left regarding her prospective publishers they vanished as Mr. Cramp made his appearance.

He looked about seventeen, and he was undersized and very fat, with yellowish-white hair and eyelashes, and reddish eyes. Anne immediately conceived a violent dislike to him.

"Miss Stafford, sir," said Wiggins glibly. "Come to arrange about the publication of her novel."

"Ah, Miss Stafford — yes," said Mr. Cramp, in a hoarse, uncertain voice. "Pray take a chair, Miss Stafford."

"No, thank you," said Anne, holding herself very erect. "I — I have decided not to write for you on the terms you propose."

"Oh!" replied Mr. Cramp. "And why not?"

"For several reasons," said Anne steadily. "In the first place, I find I have not forty-two pounds to spare. Secondly, I think a penny royalty in a book of a hundred thousand words

ought to begin with the first copy sold. And lastly, I do not think a firm of two little boys can give me the start in the literary world that I desire."

"Now, now, my dear young lady," remonstrated Mr. Cramp, seating himself sideways at the roller desk, and assuming an official air, "you must not let yourself be prejudiced by our unfortunately youthful appearance, and the unpretentiousness of our business premises. I can assure you that within the last few weeks we have netted — I mean we have secured — some of the most promising talent of the day. For one, there's young Lord G. Gander. When is his book to come out, Wiggins?"

"The date isn't fixed yet, sir," Wiggins promptly replied. "His cheque hasn't come to hand yet."

"Ah — is that so? Well, there's Mr. Tiverton Stamp. His book is certain to make a sensation. We expect to sell a thousand copies a day, if not more."

Here a smothered giggle from Mr. Wiggins made his senior glance at him sharply.

"Less of it, Wiggins," he said in a furious undertone. "You don't look well. You had better take a turn outside, while I talk to Miss Stafford."

But Anne had already opened the door.

"Good-afternoon," she said. "I am sorry, but nothing would induce me to accept your terms."

"One moment, Miss Stafford," said Mr. Cramp, rising somewhat hurriedly. "Suppose we say thirty-nine pounds, and a royalty of three-halfpence after the first three thousand? Is it a bargain? It's not an offer I'd make to everyone."

But Anne merely said:

"Good-afternoon."

And five minutes later she was in Fleet Street again, her face tingling with mortification and rage. She knew that she ought to have felt sincerely thankful for her escape, but somehow she did not. She only felt a keen, smarting sense of disappointment; and — curious psychological problem — she was conscious of a distinct wave of resentment towards Carroll.

She got home in a very bad temper, and lunched upon a hard-boiled egg, and a glass of milk, which, for some unexplained reason, was her invariable meal when "things went wrong."

This light repast over, she sat down moodily by the fire, too cross and upset even to write. She resolved that she would say nothing to Mr. Carroll regarding her interview with Messrs. Wiggins & Cramp. It was all too dreadful and

disgusting. Somehow, what stung her most of all was the sight of her letter — her diplomatic, carefully-thought out letter — in the hands of that goblinish little boy who posed as the "Wiggins" of the firm.

Here the bell rang sharply, and Anne opened the door, to admit a tall, acid-looking old lady with black hair — very much too black for her years.

"Well, my dear Miss Stafford, and how are you? I knew you would be alone, and I thought, 'Well, I am sitting comfortably by my fireside, and I don't feel as if I wanted to pay calls, but there's that poor young thing all alone, and I feel it is a Christian duty to go to see her,' and so here I am. And I've brought you a box of preserved mushrooms. They were sent to me by a friend. I never eat mushrooms myself. I'm afraid of them. Indeed, I think they are dangerous; but I thought perhaps you might fancy them."

"Oh, thank you very much," said Anne, rather dryly. "It was very kind of you to think of me."

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Hargrave, taking off her cloak, and seating herself on the sofa. "I always say, if one doesn't take thought for others one can't expect the Lord to take thought for us. Every kind action we do is just a deposit

in the celestial bank, my dear. I am a lonely widow, and have just enough to keep myself in comfort, but it's a never-failing satisfaction to me to think that I've always done what has seemed to me my duty, and if I were called away to-night, I'd be quite fit to go and appear before the Throne of Judgment. 'Be ye also ready' is the text I've prepared for my tombstone. It may be a guide to others," she added, with a sigh.

"And are you quite ready to die?" asked Anne curiously.

"Of course I am, my dear. I've been ready for years. I hope you are too?"

"No, indeed, I'm not," Anne answered bluntly.

Mrs. Hargrave shook her head.

"I'm sorry to hear it," she said seriously. "I'm very sorry to hear it." Then she added suddenly: "What's the matter with you to-day? You look — as if something disagreeable had happened to you."

"Do I?" was the brief answer.

"Yes. And you're brooding over it. Now, take my advice — never brood. I never do. Take a liver pill, and say your prayers. That's what I've done for many a year, when this world has seemed too much for me. It's too much for us all at times. And brooding fills many a suicide's grave. Not that I think you would be

foolish enough to do anything rash. But still, one never can tell."

"I don't feel in the least inclined to commit suicide," said Anne, a brief smile dimpling her face.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, child. It's a crime to take any life, even one's own. The very flies are sacred to me because they live. I have used fly-paper, of course; but that's different. I don't actually deprive them of life, I only place the paper where they can see it, and if they rush to their destruction, I can't be held responsible."

Anne's smile became a laugh.

"I am glad to see you can laugh, my dear. Your trouble can't be very deep. Broken hearts may smile, but they don't laugh."

"I hope my heart isn't broken," said Anne. "Do I look as if it were?"

"Better a disappointment now than an unhappy marriage later on," droned Mrs. Hargrave, as though Anne had not spoken. "Young men are very fickle — here to-day and gone tomorrow."

Anne looked annoyed. Then she laughed again.

"Young men don't come into my line of vision," she said shortly. "I haven't time."

Then, to her discomfiture, she became aware that she was blushing violently.

Mrs. Hargrave looked at her with a curiously unlovely expression in her eyes, which were of a pale, watery green.

"Ah, my dear," she said, in a voice that made Anne long to shake her, "that blush tells a tale. I never had cause to blush when any man was in question. I never allowed my fancy to stray to any member of the other sex until I was publicly engaged to my poor husband — now watching for me among the saved. Take care, Miss Stafford; you are in a very delicate position, living alone as you do, with a bachelor almost on your very doorstep."

"Please do not be so absurd, Mrs. Hargrave," said Anne sharply. "I am twenty-three years old, and I think I can be trusted to take care of myself."

"Try to curb your temper, my dear," replied the elder woman as she rose. "No young woman can be trusted to take care of herself. I saw you the other day talking to that Mr. Carroll at Philipson's window. Be careful. Brian Carroll is under a cloud. He is no friend for an attractive young girl. Remember, you come of a wild stock. I knew your grandmother's sister — her youngest sister, of course. And that is why I keep my eye on you. A brand to save from the burning, I told myself ——"

But Anne interrupted her.

"Mrs. Hargrave, I think you are an exceedingly rude old woman," she said slowly and incisively. "I don't know what your mother may have told you about my grandmother's sister, and I don't want to know, and I don't care. If you are afraid I shall come to a bad end, as you seem to imply," she added, "I should advise you to give up visiting me."

Mrs. Hargrave pursed up her withered lips.

"I hope I shall continue to do my duty," she said. "Of course, circumstances might arise — *may* arise — in which I could not go on visiting you, or even knowing you; but we will hope that that contingency may be remote. It would grieve me to have to turn aside or avert my eyes ——"

Here a muffled thumping at the door fortunately interrupted the growing incandescence of the conversation, and Anne, with crimson cheeks and ominously bright eyes, welcomed a tiny feminine visitor of seven years old or thereabouts, who flung herself into the girl's arms with a joyous little squeal of delight.

"I've come to tea," the child announced. "Mummy's gone to a party, and won't be home until it's time to go to a dinner-party, so I'm going to stay with you until you're sick and tired of me."

"How do you do, Elfie?" said Mrs. Har-

grave's highly pitched voice. "Little girls are not very polite nowadays, it seems to me."

"I beg your pardon," said the child, with a distinct change in her tone and manner. "I'm sorry if I seemed rude, but I didn't see you. I hope you are quite well?"

"Thank you, I enjoy excellent health," was the somewhat sharp rejoinder. "Tell your mother that I have called upon her three times, and found her not at home."

"I will tell her," said Elfie politely.

And with a grave, old-fashioned little bow, she walked into the sitting-room.

"Frances Charteris is spoiling that child," observed Mrs. Hargrave, as she drew her cloak more tightly round her thin shoulders. "Stuck-up, unnatural little monkey. If Frances would stay at home and look after her, instead of prancing to and fro like a merry-go-round, it would be a great deal better for her husband, and herself, and the child."

"Good-afternoon," said Anne.

"But some women have no right to have children," continued Mrs. Hargrave, bouncing across the doormat. "Why the Lord permits it puzzles me."

"Good-afternoon," said Anne.

And she gently shut the door.

"Has she gone?" asked Elfie Charteris in

an eager whisper, as Anne came into the sitting-room.

"Yes," Anne replied shortly.

"Isn't she horrid!" the child continued, with a funny little shrug. "Daddy says she's a sanctimonious old cat. She's a kind of cousin of his, I think, but so quite different from daddy. Mummy wasn't really out those days she called, you know. But she told Raynor to say she was. She simply can't bear Mrs. Hargrave. And mummy says you must be wild because mummy introduced her to you that day at our afternoon party. Oh, Anne, are you going to toast little buns for tea? And if you are, may I do it?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," Anne answered, as she began to set out the tea-things.

"It's very interesting having tea with you," continued Elfie, as she watched her hostess measure out the tea from a queer little caddy with a still queerer spoon. "At home it's not so interesting. I don't know why. P'r'aps it's because mummy's not very often at home to tea. And then I have to have mine all alone or in the kitchen. It was quite different when we lived in the country, and I had tea in the schoolroom with Miss Fanshawe. I wish you were my mummy, Anne, my dear," she added with a queer little sigh. "Shouldn't you like to have

some children? But I dare say you'd have to be married first. People generally are, I notice. I think you'd be a nice, kind mummy. Your face and hands are so soft. Of course, I'm very fond of my mummy, but she has so little time; she doesn't very often speak to me, more than just a few words. I wonder why grown-up people never hardly have dinner at home unless they're having a dinner-party? I'm not at all sure that I shall like being grown-up. Do you like it?"

"Not always," Anne answered. "Sometimes I don't like it at all. I'm not certain that I do to-day."

Elfie removed a carefully toasted bun from the toasting-fork and substituted another.

"Why?" she asked. "Have things gone contrary? Cook says there are days when they do."

Anne laughed.

"Cook is quite right," she answered. "One thing, at least, has gone wrong to-day. But don't let us think of tiresome things. When is the new governess coming?"

"I don't know. Daddy says I'm not to have any lessons for a few more weeks. He says I'm ever so much thinner than I was before I had influenza. And I'm very glad. I hate lessons."

"Yes, most of us do," acquiesced Anne.

"Now, you are burning your face. It will be like a ripe tomato in a minute. Come and have tea. You have toasted enough buns to go on with."

"If I do have a new governess," went on Elfie, as she ensconced herself in a chair at the tea-table, "I know she won't be nearly as nice as my dear old Miss Fanshawe. She came when I was only five and a half, and now I'm a quarter past seven. The new one is to be French, mummy says. I'm certain I shan't be able to bear her."

Here a loud barking was heard in the corridor outside. When it had continued for a few minutes, Elfie said:

"I do believe that's Boxer. He belongs to the gentleman who lives just opposite to you — Mr. Carroll."

"Do you know Mr. Carroll, then?" asked Anne.

"No. I don't think anybody knows him. But he picked me up one day when I fell going downstairs. And I asked him what his name was, and he told me. And he told me his dog's name was Boxer. I'll just peep and see if it is Boxer. Shall I?"

And she was at the hall door before Anne had time to answer.

No sooner was the door opened than Boxer

rushed in, and took up his position before the stove.

"Isn't he a darling!" said Elfie, hugging him ecstatically. "Mr. Carroll must be out, for the glass of his door's all dark. May I give Boxer a bun, Anne dear? He looks so hungry. And you'll let me help you wash up the tea-things, won't you?"

"Yes. But you must have an apron on."

"I sometimes think I should like to be a domestic servant," observed Elfie pensively, as she stood on a footstool carefully drying a plate. "It must be so interesting and amusing. Washing up things, and dusting, and climbing up and down step-ladders and things. I said so to mummy one day. But she said I was a little horror, and she couldn't imagine where I got my low ideas from. Mummy's very funny, you know. If she's cross and tired, she scolds one for the least thing. And other days it seems as if nothing could make her cross. I think she's very pretty, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," said Anne heartily. "And I think she is delightful to talk to."

"Is she?" was the somewhat wistful answer. "Well, of course I don't know. Perhaps when I'm grown-up she'll talk to me. I suppose it can't be very interesting, talking to little girls. Am I bothering you, Anne dear?"

"No, dear. I like talking to little girls — some little girls."

And I really am being of use, you know," went on Elfie, "because if I hadn't helped you to wash up the tea-things you would have had to do it yourself."

"Of course I should," smiled Anne.

As she spoke she carried the butter-dish and the milk-jug into the tiny kitchen, and proceeded to put them away in an odd little contrivance which she called a larder, but which, as a matter of fact, was merely a tiny, air-swept cupboard approached by two rather steep steps. As she fastened the door again, and turned to descend the steps, she slipped and twisted her ankle rather badly.

Elfie heard her fall, and hurried into the kitchen, dropping a plate in her hurry.

"Oh, Anne dear, what is it?" she cried.

"I've hurt my ankle somehow," said Anne with a difficult smile, as she limped to a chair.

"Take off your shoe and stocking and bathe it with vinegar," said the little one eagerly. "I'll do it. That's what mummy did when she slipped on a piece of orange-peel."

And with deft, swift fingers she stripped off Anne's shoe and stocking, poured some vinegar into a saucer, and by the aid of a soaked duster bathed the injured foot tenderly and copiously

for at least five minutes, while Boxer, having sauntered in from the sitting-room, looked on with staid approval.

Suddenly the dog pricked up his ears, listened for a second or two, then ran into the hall with a mingling of barks and whines.

"I'll let him out," said Elfie, dropping the duster. "It's because he hears Mr. Carroll coming, I suppose."

She opened the hall-door as Carroll was putting his latch-key into the opposite keyhole.

"Oh, Mr. Carroll," she exclaimed as Boxer dashed past her, "Anne's broken her ankle, and I've broken a plate."

"Why, it's little Elfie," said Carroll, as he turned round. "What did you say? Someone broken her ankle? Not Miss Stafford, I hope?"

"Yes — Miss Stafford. She slipped down the larder steps. I've been bathing it. Do come. She can't walk."

Carroll drew his door shut, and, followed by Boxer, went with his little guide into Anne's flat.

"I am so sorry to hear of your accident, Miss Stafford," he said. "Can I be of any use? Let me help you into the other room, and you can rest upon the sofa. I hope the little one is mistaken in saying your ankle is broken?"

"It is only a sprain," said Anne, looking

rather annoyed. "I dare say it will be all right in the morning."

"I am not so sure," he answered. "May I look at it?" he added, when she was comfortably installed upon the sofa.

"Oh, it is nothing," she said. "It is absurd to make such a fuss. Of course you can look at it if you like. Are you a doctor in disguise?"

He did not reply, except by a brief, indulgent smile.

But, after a short examination of the foot, he said:

"I don't think any bones are broken, but I should advise you to be careful, and to rest as much as possible for the next few days."

"Does it hurt very much, Anne dear?" said little Elfie anxiously.

"Yes," Mr. Carroll answered, "it hurts a good deal; but Miss Stafford is too plucky to say so."

"I must finish putting away the tea-things," observed Elfie; "and then I'll sit and talk to you till it's time to go home, you poor, poor Anne."

Carroll had meanwhile bandaged Anne's foot rather skilfully with some strips of linen which he found in her work-basket.

"Is that more comfortable?" he said.

"Yes, I think it is," she answered frankly. "Thank you ever so much."

When he had gone after making Anne promise, that she would let him know if there was anything he could do for her, Elfie said thoughtfully:

"He's very nice, you know. I think he would be very kind to his children if he had any."

CHAPTER IV

For the next three weeks or so Carroll loomed very large in Anne's scheme of life. She was obliged to bury her half-formed resentment, and to confess that he really was very kind — kind in a matter-of-fact, helpful way that was unembarrassing and refreshing.

He rang the bell every morning about half-past eleven or thereabouts, and besides posting letters and parcels ordered in infinitesimal supplies from the various shops almost as economically and satisfactorily as Anne herself could have done. He also lent her books and magazines, and sometimes sat down and talked for half an hour. Thus a species of frank comradeship sprang up between them.

On the first day that she was able to walk easily, he took her for a quiet saunter in Kensington Gardens. And when they returned to Aberdare Mansions, she invited him to tea.

And it was then, in the quiet, sunlit March afternoon, that she told him (in contradiction to her former resolution) of what she called "the Wiggins & Cramp fiasco."

He did not smile and say he had told her so, as she was half afraid he would do. On the contrary, he was bluntly and sincerely sympathetic, and said it was a "damned shame." Whereby Anne felt curiously resigned and comforted.

"It seems hard lines that you should have to struggle against the world alone," he said after a pause.

"It is entirely my own fault," she answered. "But for what has been characterized as my 'waywardness,' I might have been purring in the lap of luxury under the protection of a wealthy, elderly, impossible aunt."

"But it would have been far better for you," he said quickly. "You are too young, and too — too unusual-looking to live all alone and work precariously for your living."

"I have a tiny income of my own," she answered, her lips parting in the queer little half-smile that always fascinated him. "I couldn't quite starve — only nearly."

"And suppose you were to be ill?" he went on, thinking of a poor and lonely woman who had been found dead and frozen in her microscopic flat near Sloane Square some months ago. "It is not right, I tell you. It is not fit for any woman. You might be dead for days before anyone knew of it."

"And what about you?" she answered lightly.

"You, too, are all alone. You, too, might be ill — or dead. No one but Boxer would be the wiser."

Carroll laughed.

"Boxer would take very good care that one or two people should be the wiser," he said.

Anne was leaning back in her chair, busy with some trivial sewing. The sky had become overcast, and an early dusk filled the room.

"Shall I tell you about myself?" she asked suddenly.

"If you will honor me so far," he answered.

"My mother died years ago," she said, after a brief silence; "and dad and my brother and sister and I lived in a cottage in Essex until a year ago, when dad died."

She paused, then went on:

"My elder sister married a man I particularly dislike. They live in Norfolk Street, Park Lane. She is one year older than I am, and never loses an opportunity of letting me feel that I am singularly inferior to her in all the things that matter. Only in one thing do I score," she added viciously: "Myra — her name is Myra — is quite plain, and I — am not.

"My brother Jim," she went on with a sigh, as her companion did not speak, "accepted a post abroad, in Singapore. I hear from him sometimes, and I write to him once a week. And it

was arranged that I should go to live with the aunt I have mentioned. I tried it for nearly four months, and then — I ran away. I came to London, found this flat, and here I am," she concluded hurriedly.

"But did your aunt make no inquiries about you?" asked Carroll. "Did she make no efforts to trace you?"

Anne shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know. I suppose she did. But, of course, I never heard of them — at least, until some time afterwards, when I accidentally met my sister in Knightsbridge one day. Then she — my sister, I mean — painted my conduct in such large capitals and such glaring colors that for about five minutes I felt myself quite unfit for publication. But it passed off. She has been to see me once. She calls this darling flat a stuffy hole. And I have been to dine with her and her priggish husband once. Only a fortnight ago I had a letter from my deserted aunt. She calls me a serpent and a monster of ingratitude, and hints that she fears I am lost to all sense of shame, as she hears I am living alone in a flat, which she does not consider respectable. And she declares that I shall not have a penny of her money. Silly old thing! As if I had ever expected it!"

"But why couldn't you live with her?" asked

Carroll, a shade of disapproval in his tone. "Was she so very impossible? I am old-fashioned, you know, and I ——"

"Yes, I know," she interrupted him. "You are a wee bit old-fashioned. It is one of the things I like in you."

"Are there many things?" he asked.

"Several," was the grave answer. Then she added: "Seriously, you must be rather an unique person. Because, though I have hardly known you a month, you seem somehow to be so little of a stranger. And, though you may not believe it, I am really rather a reserved creature. As a rule it takes me quite a long time to be on intimate terms with anyone. But with you I have the feeling that, however frank and unreserved I might be, you would never presume or misunderstand. You know what I mean? I am rather stupid in explaining things."

He looked across at her with friendly, comprehending eyes.

"I understand," he answered quietly. "Well, one likes to be taken on trust. But — it is not always safe, I suppose. Perhaps it will surprise you to learn that I, too, am a person of rather reserved temperament. I am certainly not given to sudden friendships."

"Oh, have you truly a friendly feeling towards me?" she asked quickly.

"Yes — honestly, yes," he replied, a faint flicker of surprise crossing his face.

"Then I am very glad," she said earnestly, "because, do you know, it sounded so — so desolate the other night when you said you had no friends."

"Except Boxer," he put in with an odd smile.

"Well, you can't say that any more," she said, looking at him with eyes as clear and frank as a child's. "I have always wanted to have a man friend. I have had girl friends — I could have them still if I liked. But there is always a survival of the cat in them all. They may be advanced and learned and at home on every subject under the sun; they may be raging and furious supporters of woman's suffrage; they may spend all their spare time in their clubs and all their spare money at bridge; they may only be enthusiasts in motoring, golfing, hockeying, aeroplaning, and a dozen other things, but at heart they are — not all, of course, but the most of them are — cats!"

Boxer awoke suddenly from slumber, and barked wildly, for Anne had pronounced the last word with perhaps unnecessary vehemence.

"Lie down, Boxer," said his master soothingly. "And what about you, then, Miss Stafford?" he asked. "Does the cat survive in you, too? I hope not."

"I'm not sure," she answered, laying down her work and folding her hands. She had remarkably pretty hands, and was not unaware that she had. "Perhaps my remarks may have had a catty flavor," she added doubtfully.

"They had," he acquiesced. "I am sorry to inaugurate our new friendship by differing from you, but I know — or have known — a good many women, and I think I am right in saying that among them the cat percentage was not large."

"Oh, well, our experiences must have been different, I suppose," Anne said carelessly. "But don't you know that cattiness is a quality — if it can be called a quality — that a man never recognizes? There are many names he calls it by, but never the right one."

"Is that so?" he answered, pulling the ears of Boxer, who, now wide-awake and alert, was counting the times that the word abhorred by every right-minded dog occurred in the conversation between his master and his master's friend.

Anne nodded.

"How am I to recognize cats, then?" Carroll asked, with an air of anxiety.

Boxer glanced from one to the other in wonder and barely veiled pity. At least, so it seemed to them both, and they laughed heartily.

Presently Anne said:

"Now what about your confessions? I have made a clean breast of all my sins and shortcomings."

Carroll's expression changed, and his face darkened perceptibly.

"I don't know that I have any particular confessions to make," he answered, in a constrained voice. "I live a solitary life enough. But that is entirely my own fault. As I told you, I have no friends, with the two exceptions that you know of. And — well, that's about all."

"But why have you no friends?" asked Anne, as she had asked once before.

"If I told you ——" he began slowly. Then with an impatient movement of his head, he added: "But I couldn't tell you — not without biasing you one way or another."

"I am sure," Anne said, in a low, deliberate voice, "that it is nothing that you are ashamed of!"

"Are you so sure?" he answered. "I wonder why?"

"Ought I not to be sure?" she asked.

"I cannot tell. They say good women have intuitions. Yours may be right."

"But — surely you know?"

"Know what? Whether I have anything to

be ashamed of? I sometimes wonder. I sometimes debate within myself as to whether one ought not to be more ashamed of being a fool than of being a knave."

"Must one be either the one or the other?"

"There are times when it would seem so."

"I don't see you in either rôle," she said.

He smiled slightly.

"I will be honest with you, Miss Stafford," he said. "It is not too late for you to withdraw your half-promised friendship. Indeed, I am not at all sure that your relatives would consider it an altogether desirable friendship. As a matter of fact, I am a man under a cloud ——"

"Yes, I know," she answered tranquilly. "At least, I have heard so."

"You have heard so?" he echoed sharply. "From whom have you heard it?"

"Does it matter?" she answered. "I heard it. But I like to judge my friends by my own observations. One can gauge people's characters so much better at first hand. If you are under a cloud, as you call it, I am sure you have been put in that position unjustly."

He was leaning his elbow on the table, and shading his eyes with his hand. But he was looking intently at her pretty, if rather severe, profile as she gazed into the steady glow of the stove.

"You won't take my warning, then?" he said, in an odd voice.

"Your warning?" she repeated.

"Yes, as to my undesirability as a friend."

"If I find you undesirable I shall drop you at once," she said, with a gurgling little laugh. "Besides, it is too late for warnings. We can't throw aside our friendship now, when we have grown accustomed to one another."

"Yes, that's true," he acquiesced. "We have grown accustomed to one another. And yet — think of it — a couple of weeks ago we were unaware of our respective existences."

"It's almost like the rapidity with which friendships are made on board ship," Anne said reflectively.

"Yes. I knew a man who met a girl on one of the liners going out to Pernambuco. They sailed on a Saturday, and got to know one another on Sunday, and before the following Sunday they were engaged."

"I hope they were unhappy," Anne answered calmly. "They deserved to be."

"On the contrary, they were — are, indeed — very happy. They have been married for ten years."

"I don't see how a girl could promise to give herself to a man she had only known for a week," continued Anne scornfully.

"Oh, I don't know. It all depends. How many weeks' acquaintanceship should you think necessary?"

"I don't think I should make it a question of weeks," she said, still with an inflection of scorn in her fresh young voice. "You can't know much of a man's character in a week — or even five or six weeks."

"But does a girl think of a man's character when she promises to marry him?" he asked.

"I really don't know. I should think so. But, then, I never promised to marry anyone."

"I thought only two things, as a rule, weighed with women in matters matrimonial," observed Carroll.

"Did you? What two things?"

"Well, some girls only think of a man's worldly position, and what it can give them; and others — well, I suppose there are women who simply care for a man for what he is, without thinking whether he is good or bad, rich or poor."

"One doesn't pick the things one loves to pieces," Anne said shortly. "At least, I should imagine not."

"I should think you would be a very loyal friend," he answered, with a brief smile.

"Of course, if I were a friend at all, I should

be loyal," was the curt answer. "That is what friendship means — loyalty."

"I'm afraid it is not everyone's idea."

"Isn't it yours?" she asked.

"I hope to be loyal to my latest friend," he answered. "And it is comforting to know that she will be loyal to me."

There was a silence, broken only by the subdued murmur of traffic in the street far below.

"I think you have a very nice face," Anne said suddenly, with a thoughtful and impersonal air that rather amused her companion.

They smiled in concert, and she hastened to add:

"I was really arguing with myself why we should have become friends so soon."

"I quite understand," he answered. "I, too, have been pursuing a similar line of argument."

She frowned.

"Don't say things like that!" she exclaimed, with a displeased movement of her pretty hands. "It sounds cheap."

"Why should it sound cheaper for me to say it than for you?" he asked calmly. "We both meant it. Women are such analysts."

"And men are so casual," she answered.

"And both men and women persist in ignoring the fact that it is not so much in the qualities of

either sex that the differences lie," said Carroll, with a slight movement of his shoulders, "as in the varieties of type in both sexes. There are womanly men and manly women. Or rather, there are men with more or less womanly characteristics, and *vice versa.*"

"It is quite true," she agreed. "And yet people persist in saying, 'How like a woman,' or 'How like a man.'"

"By the way," he said, "had you a visit yesterday from a young woman of masculine appearance, who wanted to sell you tickets for a meeting to promote woman's suffrage?"

"Yes," she answered. "But I told her, in an exaggeratedly foreign accent, that Mademoiselle Stafford was out of town, and not expected back for some days. So she asked me if I would take a ticket for myself. But I said that my knowledge of the English language was so limited that it would be of no use to me. She then asked if I would buy a few tickets for friends. But I said that unless they were complimentary tickets I could not afford to take any. Did she visit you too?"

"Yes," was the gloomy answer. "I couldn't get her out of the place until I'd bought five tickets. I thought her a particularly awful person."

"Do you mean to say you bought five half-

crown tickets?" exclaimed Anne. "What reckless extravagance! What are you going to do with them?"

"Do with them? I chucked them into the waste-paper basket. Can you imagine me at a meeting for the furtherance of woman's suffrage? Not that I object to their having votes, as they're so keen on it, if they'd only go about the thing in a less rowdy way. I haven't much sympathy with hooligans, either male or female."

"I couldn't have believed that you would have been so weak-minded as to buy all those tickets," said Anne, laughing. "You should simply have bowed her out."

"I tried to," expostulated Carroll. "But she sat down and begun to discourse at such lengths that I was glad to get rid of her at any price. She was trying to make out, I believe, that woman was in every way equal to man, only more so. Indeed, I gathered that of the two, man would, in the future, have to take a back seat."

"And yet, I dare say that woman would call you unchivalrous if you refused to give up your seat in an omnibus to her on a wet day," said Anne.

"Very likely. Female enthusiasts almost invariably want both to eat their cakes and have them."

"Isn't that a failing common to humanity of both sexes?" smiled Anne.

"Yes, I suppose so. And if some of us have neither cakes to have nor to eat, I dare say we've only ourselves to blame."

His voice sounded tired; or Anne thought so.

"Aren't you in rather a pessimistic mood to-day?" she queried.

"Very likely. It is my normal mood — was, at least."

"Why the change of tense?"

"I hardly know," he said, after a barely perceptible pause. "It is possible that I may have looked at things from a different point of view of late."

"Since you know me, do you mean?" she asked quickly.

He made a silent gesture of assent.

Anne breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

"That is nice," she said. "I am feminine enough to appreciate being a good influence."

"And I am masculine enough to appreciate your femininity."

Anne looked at the queer little wooden clock on the mantelpiece.

"I don't want to be rude," she said; "but I have some translations to do which will take me some hours. So I'm afraid I must send you away."

He rose, and said, with grave lips but smiling eyes:

"Now that is real friendship. I had no idea it was so late. Always send me away when you are busy. I am assuming, you see, that you are going to let me come and see you now and then."

"Please do," she answered frankly. "And don't forget that you promised to lend me 'Thoreau.'"

"You shall have it to-morrow," he said. "I'll look out some other things too. My flat is half full of books."

When he had gone Anne worked steadily for an hour. Then she dined rapidly upon a small piece of some kind of cold pie, a couple of cream crackers, an orange, and a cup of cocoa. This repast disposed of, she drew her chair up to the fire for what she called a "quiet laze" before beginning work again.

She wondered — perhaps it was only natural that she should wonder — what the cloud was that hung over her friend's good name.

It was strange, she acknowledged, how she trusted him — this man who had crossed her path so recently. She felt certain that, whatever evil was imputed to him, he was innocent. And yet — what could it be? Perhaps one day he would tell her.

It was curious, she thought, with a distinct thrill of satisfaction, how he seemed already to value her companionship. And she did not attempt to disguise from herself that she looked forward to his visits. She felt as though they were old friends. Why had they been drawn together in this way? Perhaps — Anne had queer little superstitions, not altogether religious, and not entirely irreligious — perhaps it had been intended that she should enter into his life to comfort him and help him in his loneliness. This thought filled her with a curious content.

She tried to imagine what she would say supposing he did tell her. She pictured him sitting opposite to her, just as he had done this afternoon. She could almost hear his deep, pleasant voice. Yes, she knew exactly how he would look, and how, when his story was finished, he would turn his kind eyes to hers with the earnest, questioning glance that she had learned to know.

Just then the bell rang. It was a maid with a note from Mrs. Charteris, who lived in the flat immediately below.

"ANNE OF MY HEART" (the note ran),

"Come and take pity on me. I have a face swollen to the size of a large melon, and so am not fit to be seen out of doors. Also I have a fit of the blues that nothing but the sight of your

cheerful little face can cure. Alfred is dining out, and Elfie is in bed. Do come.

"Yours ever,

"FRANCES V. CHARTERIS."

Anne liked frivolous, irresponsible Fanny Charteris, and, with a queer little smile on her lips, she turned out the lamp and went downstairs.

"Ah, there you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Charteris. "It is a refreshment to see your calm, cold, dear little face. Are you ever in a temper, Anne? Do life, and your belongings, and the world in general, ever seem to you hopelessly, horribly, inadequate? But no — you are too well-balanced, well-regulated, well wound up. Look at me, for pity's sake! Did you ever see such a sketch?"

"You are a vain little fraud," said Anne calmly, as she threw her cape on a chair. "Your face is hardly swollen at all. Mine has often been far worse."

"Oh, I dare say, though I don't believe a word of it. Your face wouldn't — couldn't swell up. It knows very well you would slap it if it did," grumbled Frances, half laughing.

"Shall I slap yours?" asked Anne, as she stooped to stroke the cat. "I often feel as if I should like to."

"Sit down," said the other, "and talk to me. How is the ankle? I really forgot it was still weak when I asked you to come in. However, I saw you out to-day with the Unknown. Oh, don't tell me his name is Carroll; I'm positive it isn't. And, my dear Anne, I must warn you that our revered friend, Mrs. Hargrave, assured me this afternoon that she hopes the extraordinary intimacy between you and the Unknown is all — or no more than — it should be. She always says she takes an interest in you, though she doesn't approve of you — because she knew your grandmother's youngest sister."

"Yes, I know. To speak vulgarly, I'm rather fed up with my grandmother's youngest sister."

"You poor dear! I'm sure you're fed up with old Hargrave as well. I'm awfully sorry I made you known to each other. But she made a point of it. I rather think your grandmother's sister was dragged in as a reason. By the way, how long is it since we first met — you and I? It must be nearly seven months. I think I can hear you say now, in that sweet, prim little voice of yours, 'Am I right in supposing that this flat is to let?' and my telling you that it was the one upstairs."

"And telling me that I looked very tired — which I was — and asking me to have a cup of tea," replied Anne affectionately. "And saying

you knew how tired house-hunting made one feel. It was very rash of you, Frances. I might have been a most undesirable person. Mrs. Hargrave wouldn't have taken me on trust like that, not without my grandmother's sister as a make-weight."

"Oh, rubbish!" answered Frances, moving her pretty head impatiently. "I liked you, and you liked me, and there we were. And then — do you remember? — Elfie fell in love with you at first sight, and she's not a child who takes to all and sundry. By the way, she also seems to have struck up an acquaintance with the Unknown. He passed us on the stairs yesterday. He really is quite good-looking. But these questionable people often are."

"Questionable?" echoed Anne sharply. "It is the very last word I should think of applying to Mr. Carroll."

"Anne — Anne!" exclaimed Frances with uplifted eyebrows, "are matters so far advanced that you fly to arms at the slightest aspersion on the character of this stranger?"

"He has been very, very kind to me," said Anne in a cold, angry voice. "I do not know what I should have done without him. Even you took no notice, though you knew I was lame and helpless."

"My dear, how unkind! — when you know

Elfie and I have been down in Wiltshire for days, and only returned this morning. And it was only after we had started that she told me of your accident. Besides, my sweetest Anne, I know I am a featherhead, but occasionally I do have gleams of prudence and common-sense. And I can't help thinking that it is just a shade imprudent to make a friend of a man who isn't anybody, and may be anything. Now, isn't it?"

"He is a gentleman," said Anne dryly, "and he is thoughtful and unselfish and kind-hearted. Besides, he is very clever. He is a successful author."

"Is he?" yawned Frances. "But there are so many of them. They are like the sands of the sea. Why, you will be one in a year or so. However, you know I can't bear to worry people when they are having a good time, even if it isn't exactly a proper time. So don't look cross, and do take that little furrow from between your brows. I shan't interfere. You know me better than that, I hope?"

"How is your husband?" asked Anne abruptly.

"My dear Anne, is he ever anything but well? He is always in the most robust and indecent health. Just now he is fearfully excited about the Daylight Saving Bill. So absolutely idiotic! A kind of nursery make-believe. If people want

to get up at six, in Heaven's name let them do it! But why on earth they should pretend they are getting up at seven, and put the clock on to seven, I can't for the life of me understand."

Anne laughed.

"You've got hold of it the wrong way, you absurd creature!" she said. "It really won't make much difference to you and me. It simply means ——"

"Oh, I know," interrupted Frances, putting her hands over her ears. "I have heard it all until I am tired. On a certain morning in the middle of the night in April all the clocks in Great Britain shall be put on an hour or put back — I forget which. And the saving of gas and electric light to railway companies and other absurd societies will be countless millions. Alfred is quite cracked about it, just the same as he always is every now and then about the latest fad, however outrageous it may be. I remember, a few years ago, he insisted on walking about in sandals, like an early Saxon, or Greek, or Roman. And he wanted me to do the same. Don't you imagine it? I hope it wasn't very sinful of me, but I danced for joy — privately, of course — when he had his unprotected foot badly trodden upon in an omnibus. My dear, his language! Even the bus-conductor looked envious. However, it was a death-blow to the sandal craze so

far as Alfred was concerned. And another time, when we lived in the country, he took a fancy for sleeping in trees, said it was unhealthy to sleep indoors, and that the idea of being enclosed in four walls oppressed him and overweighted his brain — or something like that. But one night, when a biting north-east wind was blowing, he caught cold, and had pneumonia, and thought he was going to die. So that was given up. Alfred can be very trying," she added, with a pathetic little sigh. "He knows I hate this pokey flat, but he says I am so extravagant he must be economical somewhere."

"He's very good-looking," said Anne, who always brought forward the best points of the absent. "And you know you are an extravagant little thing."

"Do you think so?" Mrs. Charteris queried plaintively. "Well, certainly, I thought so before I married him. In fact, I think that was why I did marry him. But I suppose I have got accustomed to him. It's curious, you know, how one admires a thing and wants a thing until one gets it, and then it just seems as if one had always had it, and it doesn't count. That little Sheraton cabinet, for instance. I saw it in a shop in Knightsbridge, and simply gave Alfred no peace until he bought it. And now I hardly ever look at it. Do you feel like that about things?"

"No, I don't," Anne answered bluntly. "I never get tired of things that I like. I always have exactly the same pride and delight in them that I had when I first got them."

"Really? Well, you ought to be very happy when you marry," murmured Frances, strangling a yawn. "I very soon got tired of Alfred, and I know he did of me."

"Did he tell you so?" Anne asked, a tinge of amusement in her voice.

"No, not in so many words. But he began to criticize my dress, and the way I did my hair. And he never even noticed if I had new shoes on. And he has told me more than once that I am an empty-headed baby. It seems he admires clever women. He never used to."

"Why, you poor little thing!" said the other compassionately. "I always thought you and your husband jogged along so comfortably."

"Oh yes, we jog along. But, after all, jogging doesn't spell the ideal marriage."

"The ideal marriage," said Anne, with a little ripple of laughter. "My good Frances, you are the very last creature in the world I should think of in connection with ideals. You are the most essentially practical woman I know."

"Oh, I dare say," was the gloomy answer. "I am not in the least practical. I can be as romantic as even you ——"

Anne shrugged her shoulders.

"I?" she said scornfully. "I haven't an ounce of romance in all my personality, except what goes into my stories."

"My good Anne, you are only on the doorstep of your own personality as yet. You haven't found yourself, as Alfred would say."

"I've found a good deal," Anne replied dryly. "Quite as much as I have use for at present."

"How horrid you are!" murmured Frances. "I sent for you to cheer me up, and you've done nothing but snap at me."

"Perhaps I've been a tonic in disguise," said Anne, as she stood up to go.

"I hope you haven't fallen in love with the Unknown," observed Frances inconsequently.

"Oh yes, I have," returned Anne, as she fastened the clasp of her cape. "I am that kind of person. I wonder you haven't noticed it."

"Don't sneer, Anne," remonstrated Frances. "You're really quite pretty, you know. But you're not pretty enough to sneer. So few people are. Besides, how was I to know? You're just one of those wayward, not-to-be-calculated-upon girls who always fall in love with the very men they ought not to."

"That kind of talk always seems to me so vulgar," said Anne calmly.

"Mercy on us! If falling in love is vulgar,

what next?" exclaimed Mrs. Charteris, throwing out her heavily-ringed little hands.

"I didn't say falling in love was vulgar, dear," the other answered, as she stooped to kiss her. "I only meant — if I ever do care for any man very much, it will mean something so tremendous to me that I don't suppose I shall want to talk about it."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Frances, looking genuinely puzzled.

CHAPTER V

"And my people ask politely
How a friend I know so slightly
Can be more to me than others I have liked a year or so.
But they never heard the history
Of our transmigration's mystery,
And they've no idea I loved you these millenniums ago."

FRANCES CHARTERIS'S careless words had stirred Anne more than she would have cared to own. And as she lay awake that night, gazing out over the rain-damped roofs, she had an uncomfortable feeling that feather-brained Frances might not be altogether wrong. Her face burned hotly at the thought.

Then she reflected that, after all, there was nothing to be ashamed of. If it were true, it would do Brian Carroll no harm. And he need never know, unless — unless he cared too. But, as yet, she was very sure he did not.

Far away across the roofs she could see a dimly-lit window, enclosing a silhouette of a woman's figure, its face bowed on its hands, rocking ceaselessly backward and forward, as if in some agony of pain, or grief, or despair.

Anne had often seen it before, and longed ten-

der-heartedly to rush across the intervening space to comfort it. Perhaps it was that same tender-heartedness in Anne that had given rise to her quickly-generated affection for Carroll. He was lonely, and under a cloud, and she wanted to comfort him. I do not think her love had advanced farther than the "mothering" stage, as yet.

From her childhood Anne had always befriended and protected all hurt and maimed things that lay within her radius. Failure always appealed to her more than success. In which she differed from many of her sister women, who as often as not judge a man more by what he has done — by however slight an effort — than by what he has spent his heart's blood in trying to do.

True, Carroll was a successful writer. But Anne's instinct told her that his success in that line did not make up to him for failure in what was as yet unknown to her.

When he came in, with an armful of books, on the following evening, both were conscious of a slight but palpable restraint that had risen between them.

And after a time Carroll said:

"Is it my fancy? — or are we only making conversation, instead of exchanging thoughts as usual?"

She laughed, and coloured slightly.

"If it is fancy, it is a fancy that has invaded me too," she answered.

"Ah, I thought so," he said, as he carefully knocked the ash from his cigarette. "Now, I wonder why?"

Then he added:

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes," she answered, after a pause, "if you know."

He did not speak immediately, but leaned back in his chair with a half-frown in his kind eyes. Then he said:

"I am afraid that you have been having a vote of censure passed against you because of our — may I say friendship, or must I say acquaintanceship?"

"I like the first word best," she said, with a fleeting smile.

He bowed silently, and presently went on:

"I am right, am I not?"

"In a way — yes. And in a way — no," admitted Anne.

"Ah! You mean that the basis of our friendship has been — is being — misunderstood?"

"Something like that." And she laughed uncertainly. "But how did you know?"

"It is not a very difficult problem. It is curious that, even nowadays, when so much latitude

is allowed for simple friendship between the sexes, every now and then Mrs. Grundy uprears her dowdy head and shrieks aloud, to testify to the world that she has found yet another mare's nest. Your Mrs. Grundy, just at present, is doubly represented, I think — by our very respectable and orthodox neighbor, Mrs. Hargrave, and the pretty, feather-brained mother of our small friend Elfie."

"I should not so much mind Mrs. Hargrave," said Anne with a slight grimace. "But Frances Charteris I really like, and ——"

"You are very transparent," he answered slowly. "I am to understand, then, that it is Mrs. Charteris I have to thank for our altered relations to one another? You saw her last night, did you not?"

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw you come out of her flat."

"Oh, I did not know I was being spied upon," she made answer.

"That is rather an unwarrantable remark to make, Miss Stafford. I had no intention of spying upon you. I was coming upstairs, and could not avoid seeing you."

"Don't look so cross. I was really only joking," Anne said. "As a matter of fact, I am totally indifferent to being spied upon."

"And also, as a matter of fact, I am not given

to spying," replied Carroll. "And I don't think it is a word to be used between — friends."

Anne looked at him with grave lips but dancing eyes.

"Do you know," she said, "I am almost sure you have a very bad temper, though you have successfully concealed it so far."

"I haven't a specially angelic temper, I suppose," he answered, still with an undefinable note of coolness in his voice.

Then there was a silence.

"Are we going to quarrel, then?" inquired Anne presently.

"It is beginning to look like it," was the brief answer.

"How pleased Mrs. Hargrave would be if she knew!" murmured Anne, as she threaded her needle.

Carroll looked at her half-resentfully.

"You are a cold-hearted little thing," he said, as he lit a fresh cigarette. "I suppose it is a matter of utmost indifference to you whether our friendship ends to-night — or not."

"No," she answered deliberately. "You are quite wrong. I should miss you very much if you went out of my life now."

He leaned slightly towards her.

"Is that so, Anne?" he asked. "Is that really so?"

His voice was perhaps a shade less steady than usual.

Her color deepened ever so little as she raised her clear frank eyes to his.

"Yes," she answered quietly. "I told you I did not make friends easily. With you it has been different. In many ways you remind me of my brother Jim."

Carroll was silent for a second or two. Then he said:

"And I wonder if you have any idea of the difference our friendship has made in my life, Anne? Does it displease you that I should call you by your name, Anne?"

"No — it does not displease me."

Nor did it. On the contrary, she thought her name had never sounded so sweet. But, of course, she did not intend that he should know this.

"Then may I always call you Anne?"

"If it gives you any special pleasure to do so."

"It is a dear, quaint little name," he went on dreamily. "And it suits you. Anne! — it has a medieval sound. Is our friendship unbroken, then?" he added. "In spite of Mrs. Grundy and her myrmidons, may I still come to see you when the mood takes me? May I still bring you books and papers? May we sometimes walk in Kensington Gardens as we did yesterday?"

"I think we may leave our plans unchanged," she answered; and her voice held a gay little ring of which she was unconscious.

"It is curious," said Carroll, after a silence, "that Mrs. Hargrave, who is, according to my charwoman — the illustrious Mrs. Watkins — a 'very Christian-talking lady,' should be the inveterate gossip and mischief-maker that she evidently is. Our small friend, Elfie Charteris, is very eloquent regarding the 'Christian-talking lady's' idiosyncrasies."

"Mrs. Hargrave is simply one of the most detestable women I ever met in my life," observed Anne deliberately and viciously. "I like what might be called subcutaneous Christianity. Failing that, I like honest, kind-hearted paganism. Mrs. Hargrave is the sort of woman who would see anyone starve or drown — if they did not worship God in her particular way. She would be a dreadful person to have for a mother."

"There are so few people one would choose for mothers," he answered, with a brief, whimsical smile.

"Or fathers," laughed Anne. "By the way, you were speaking of your charwoman, Mrs. Watkins. She has only lately become mine too. My former charwoman has married a cab-pro-

prietor, and retired, in comparative affluence, to Battersea. But what I was going to say is that Mrs. Watkins has, to my mind, a good many qualifications for motherhood. She has the mother-look in her eyes. And yet, poor soul! she has had five children, and they all died when they were mere babies."

"Ah! She never took me so far into her confidence," said Carroll. "I have to check her flow of language now and then — not being interested in the gossip of what she calls 'the Mansions.'"

"She thinks you are a very intelligent gentleman," observed Anne gravely. "Also that you look 'very stern-like' at times. I delight in Mrs. Watkins. I find endless 'copy' in her. I'm afraid I encourage her to talk on purpose. She has some distinctly original ideas. She told me one day that it cheered her up wonderfully to think the Scriptures said there would be flats as well as houses in heaven, as it would seem 'kind of homey and earthy to have her bits of charing to do all under one roof, whatever the weather.' And when I pointed out that I didn't remember flats being mentioned in Scripture, she reminded me, in a tone of grieved reproof, that we were told there were 'many mansions.' I suppose she was thinking of Colecourt Mansions and others."

"When are you going to begin work again?" asked Carroll, a minute or two later.

"I don't know. Sometimes I think never. I don't seem to have a single marketable idea. I am disheartened about my work, I believe."

And as she spoke she sighed impatiently.

"You are surely not going to let yourself be disheartened by the Wiggins & Cramp incident?" he remonstrated.

"No, not altogether."

"Have I, by any chance, had any part in it?"

"No — not altogether," she said again.

"We are all out of touch with our work at times," he said. "At least, all we writing people are."

"Ah, it is good of you to class your work with my scribbling," she said, somewhat bitterly.

"You are run down, and out of sorts," he made answer, in a decided voice. "May I prescribe a tonic? No, don't make a face, please. I'm not going to suggest what Mrs. Watkins would call 'a bottle.' But should you care to come to a theatre one evening? There are lots of good things on just now."

"Oh, I should like it!" she answered. "But ——"

"But what? Is Mrs. Grundy going to intervene?"

"Oh dear no! But I wondered if it might not take you away from your work."

"It undoubtedly will. But what then?"

"I mean — can you spare the time?"

"My dear Anne, the meanest menials have their days off. Why not I?"

"Yes, I know. But — you have given up a good deal of your time to me lately, and ——"

"And you are beginning to get tired of me?" he suggested. "I never thought of that."

"Don't be ridiculous," laughed Anne. "To speak plainly, I don't suppose you write for the pleasure of seeing yourself in print — any more than I do. And I don't want you to neglect work that brings you in money, just because you think I want to be amused by being taken to theatres and ——"

"I have only spoken of our going to one theatre as yet," he said. "How downright you are, Anne! I can't imagine you beating about the bush or flirting with facts, as some women do. To speak quite honestly, I am not dependent on my writing for a livelihood. I sometimes wish I were," he added under his breath.

"Do you mean you could live comfortably without doing any work at all?" she asked.

"As far as physical comforts go, I certainly could. But I am fond enough of my work to miss it if I were condemned to idleness."

"Then — you are not what is called badly off?" questioned Anne, with such an evident regret in her tone that her listener looked amused.

"Far from it," he answered. "Rather the other way. So, you see, there is really no reason why I should not have a holiday as well as you. What is the question in your eyes, Anne?"

"Is there a question in my eyes?" she asked, coloring slightly.

"You know there is. You want to ask why, if I am moderately endowed with this world's goods, if I have made a fairly successful name in literature, I have no friends nor associates save yourself and Boxer. Why ——"

But she interrupted him.

"If my eyes make remarks of that kind I can't help it," she said decidedly. "But please understand that in this case my eyes and my lips are not in partnership."

Carroll had risen, and was walking slowly to and fro in the tiny room.

"There are times, do you know," he said, with a kind of repressed excitement in his tone, "when I feel almost tempted to tell you what novelists call 'all' — and listen to your opinion."

"Until then I am quite willing to take my friend on trust," she answered quietly.

He paused beside her, and, stooping, touched her hand with his lips.

"God bless you!" he said, and went quickly out of the room.

CHAPTER VI

BUT it so happened that after that evening Anne saw nothing of her neighbor for quite a fortnight. The sense of how much she missed him came upon her with a shock of not altogether pleasant surprise.

What could have happened? she wondered uneasily. She had seen Boxer once or twice; but, intelligent as he was, he could give her no reliable information.

At the end of the second week, however, Mrs. Watkins volunteered the information that the "writing gentleman" had been laid up with influenza.

Anne felt the color fly into her face, and she bent lower over her writing-table as she said, with elaborate carelessness:

"Indeed? I am very sorry to hear that. Who is looking after him?"

"Well, miss, to the best of my belief he's looking after hisself — excep' that I go in and do for him in the mornings and last thing at night. And I can't but think that it's flying in the face of Providence to take baths morning after morn-

ing in illness. And so I've told him, in all respect, of course. But there, he's a wilful gentleman, as anyone can see by the way his eyes are put into his head."

When Mrs. Watkins had gone, Anne sat for some time in deep thought. If it had been a woman friend who were ill, she would not have hesitated to go in and ask if she could do anything to help. Nor did she hesitate long now, for Anne was nothing if not unconventional.

"He was awfully kind to me when my foot was so bad," she reflected determinedly. "And why, just because he is a man and I a woman, should I be less kind to him? He must be at the depressed, humpy stage, when loneliness is doubly horrible. I shall go straight in."

Accordingly she stepped across the narrow corridor and rang the opposite bell.

No sooner had she done so than the doubt assailed her as to whether or not he would be out of bed. But the door opened almost immediately, and Carroll's voice said, in pleased surprise:

"Ah! this is a truly Christian act. I was just contemplating removing myself to a more cheerful and less sordid sphere. But first I must tell you that I have been in the grip of the influenza fiend. So if you are at all nervous, you must not come in."

111[illegible]

"I am not in the least nervous," Anne replied cheerfully, as she stooped to pat Boxer. "I did not know you had been ill until to-day, or I should have come before."

Carroll closed the door, and led the way to his sitting-room, which presented a forlorn and uncared-for appearance that went to Anne's heart at once. The grate was full of ashes; the chairs and tables were littered with papers, books, and parcels; and dust lay thickly everywhere. Carroll himself was looking haggard and pale, and generally influenza-ish.

"I'm afraid you will think this an abyss of frightful disorder," he said, as Anne seated herself in the only vacant chair.

"Why didn't you let me know you were ill?" she asked severely. "You were a Good Samaritan to me when I hurt my foot. Why should you not let me pay back some of my debt of gratitude?"

"Oh, well, I didn't think it was anything but a cold at first, and when I found I had a temperature, and all the rest of it, I shouldn't have dreamed of letting you run any risks."

Anne surveyed him critically.

"You look dreadful," she said. "I think you ought to see a doctor."

"Oh no; I've got over the worst. I haven't

shaved for a few days. That's why I look such an object."

"I don't think you look an object at all," she answered seriously. "But you look so thin and white — as if you had been ill for weeks. And," she added, looking round in quick distaste, "everything looks so — so desolate and comfortless. I should have thought Mrs. Watkins would have looked after you better than this."

"It isn't her fault, poor old soul!" he said, leaning back with a tired gesture in a corner of the sofa. "But she makes such an appalling row dusting things and doing up the grate, and all that, so I told her to leave everything alone, and have a general clean-up the first day I'm able to be out."

"You ought not to be up," said Anne. "I wonder if you would be sensible, and go to bed for an hour or two, and let me dust and tidy up this room? Can you trust me not seriously to disarrange your books and papers?"

"I think I could trust you with a good many things, Anne," he answered, pushing his hair wearily back from his forehead. "But why should you tire yourself by doing things like that for me ——"

"Because we have agreed to be friends. And friends like to do things for one another," she

answered, with an adorable little smile. "Now please do be good, and go and lie down. You have no idea how tired and done-up you look."

"All right," he said, as he rose obediently. "Don't make hay of quite all my papers and things."

"'Trust me all in all, or not at all,'" she quoted, laughing. "I'll be as careful as if they were my own."

A couple of hours later Carroll awoke from a troubled sleep to find Boxer licking his face diligently.

He lay for some time only half awake, pulling the dog's ears, and wondering drowsily if Anne were still there. It gave him a vague sense of pleasure to think of her flitting about his sitting-room, almost as if it were her own.

He lay for a few minutes longer, and then got up, put on such of his clothes as he had taken off, and went out into the little hall. As he crossed it he saw that the front-door was ajar. He left it so, and pushed open the door of the sitting-room.

It was empty, but a bright fire was burning cheerily in a clean, dustless grate, its dancing flames reflected in a carefully-swept hearth. His books and papers had not been touched that he could see; but an indescribable air of orderli-

ness pervaded them and everything in the room. The centre-table had a lace-edged white cloth spread corner-wise upon it, and a tiny bowl of daffodils seemed to suggest spring and sunshine. Carroll felt the depression that had held him for so long lifting appreciably.

Boxer gave a short, welcoming bark as the door was pushed open, and Anne came in, carrying a tray containing two basins of soup and two dainty rolls.

"I listened, and heard that you were up," she said cheerfully; "so I thought you wouldn't mind sharing my lunch. I have a kind of feeling that you haven't eaten anything for days and days."

"I certainly haven't enjoyed anything I've eaten for days and days," he said, as he took the tray from her in spite of her remonstrances, and set it on the table.

"Well, you are going to enjoy this soup," she said. "I know it is nice, for I made it myself. And perhaps you won't mind my having mine beside you. Then I can see that you don't give your share to Boxer."

"I can assure you I don't feel at all inclined to give my share to Boxer," he answered, as he unfolded his table-napkin. "I feel absolutely ravenous."

"How splendid!" said Anne, looking de-

lighted. "Don't you wish I had rung the bell ten days ago?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know. Ten days ago I don't think I could have struggled with even such heavenly soup as this. You never told me you were a certificated cook, Anne."

"You don't know half the things I am," she said, as she prepared to carry off the empty soup-basins.

"I can't have you waiting on me like this," he exclaimed, frowning a little as she went towards the door. "It is absurd that you should ——"

But she had disappeared, to return presently with two crisply-fried fillets of plaice decorated with sprigs of parsley.

"Anne, Anne, what am I to do with you?" he exclaimed, as she once more seated herself opposite to him.

"You are to eat that piece of fish, every crumb," was the autocratic answer.

And without further speech he did as he was bid. Anne devoured her fish with lightning speed, and hurried off to her own domain, whence she emerged in a comparatively short time with a wonderful omelette.

Carroll leaned back in his chair and said in a serious voice:

"You are not a cook, I see, but a dangerous magician. Anne, I am dreadfully afraid of you."

"You must not talk, you must eat," she commanded, with a grave face, as she divided the omelette in two.

When it was satisfactorily disposed of, Carroll went to a cupboard in a corner of the room, and produced a stout dog-biscuit for Boxer, who took it under the table, and crunched it up with evident enjoyment.

"Oh, I forgot coffee!" exclaimed Anne; "and my kettle isn't boiling. But just wait a few minutes ——"

"No, it is my turn now," interrupted Carroll. "I shall make the coffee. But you may come and see me do it. I had the recipe — or whatever you call it — from a servant I once had, a French-Canadian. His coffee was the finest I ever tasted anywhere, at home or abroad."

He led the way to the kitchen, and put a match to the gas-stove.

"Would you believe it?" he said, as he filled a small kettle. "I haven't had the energy even to smoke for the last fortnight, much less to take the trouble to make coffee. Your visit seems to have put new heart into me, for I begin to long violently for a cigarette."

"That is good," said Anne, with a nod of sat-

isfaction. "I am supposed to be rather a tonical person, you know. At one time I thought of training as a nurse."

"Glad you didn't," said her host briefly, as he measured out liberal spoonfuls of coffee.

"Your flat is quite differently arranged from mine," observed Anne, her eyes roving round the kitchen walls and cupboards.

"Yes, they are all different, I believe," replied Carroll, who was absorbedly busy with the coffee-pot. "Do you mind looking if there is any milk in that brown jug?"

"Yes, a little," she said. "I'll warm it, shall I?"

Anne was quite happy. It was indescribably pleasant to her to be alone with him in this domestic, intimate fashion. She did not worry herself to wonder why, nor to analyze her feelings in any way. She only knew that a dreamy content enfolded her, and that she would have liked the present conditions to last forever.

As for Carroll, his feelings towards Anne had been no secret to him for some time. He knew very well that in fostering their intimate friendship he was playing with fire. But he told himself that the danger was to himself alone. And the present pleasure was worth any possible suffering in the days to come.

"Have you travelled much?" Anne asked, as

they sipped Carroll's very excellent coffee a few minutes later.

"Yes, I've been about a good deal," he answered. "But why?"

"Because you seem to have so many odds and ends from various places. This would be a delightful room if it were ordinarily tidy."

Carroll lit a second cigarette.

"I mean to put it in order one of these days," he said. "There are dozens of books and things I have no more use for. Anne — what conversational eyes you have! Do you mean you would like to help?"

"I should love it," she exclaimed. "There are scores of quaint, absurd things I should like to dust and arrange, and ask you about."

"Well, you shall," he said, looking amused. "One day next week, perhaps, we will have a regular field-day — after Mrs. Watkins has done such sordid ground-work as scrubbing, window-cleaning, etc."

"Meanwhile, I must go," she said, rising as she spoke, and pouring the last few drops of coffee into a saucer for Boxer, who received it gratefully. "And you ought to rest now," she added, with an air of authority. "You must be tired."

"On the contrary, I am beginning to feel quite fit," he answered. "I don't want you to

go, Anne," he added, as he took the hand she held out to him. "Will you come again to-morrow?"

"Perhaps. If there is really anything I can do for you."

"Oh, there'll be lots of things," he answered vaguely and hurriedly. "I'm not nearly myself yet, and ——"

Their eyes met, and they both laughed.

"I will come to-morrow afternoon about tea-time," she said, "if you promise to have a proper lunch. And what are you going to do about dinner to-night?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, they usually send my lunch and dinner round from that little restaurant opposite the post-office. But I've felt so seedy and so antagonistic to all food lately that I told them not to call until I sent for them."

"The idea!" exclaimed Anne severely. "No wonder you look as you do. What have you been living upon?"

"Oh, eggs and milk and things," he answered, with a slight movement of his shoulders. "I had all I wanted, I can assure you. Mrs. Watkins was very kind."

"Shall I tell them, as I pass, to send in dinner to-night?" asked Anne. "I shall be going that way in an hour or so."

"Thank you, if you would."

"Is there anything special you would like them to send?"

"No. They know my likes and dislikes pretty well. They never send me pork chops or stewed veal, two articles of diet which I loathe and abhor."

Anne made a face.

"Pork chops! Oh, horrible! I don't think I could eat a pork chop if I were starving on a desert island," she said, with a shudder.

"If we were starving on a desert island, I have no doubt we should welcome either pork or veal with prayers of thankfulness," he answered dryly. "I have been on a desert island, and so I know."

"Have you really? How interesting! Will you tell me all about it to-morrow afternoon?"

"I will tell you something about it. Not all, perhaps."

"Well, good-by until to-morrow. You are sure there is nothing more I can do for you? Nothing I can order from the chemists?"

"No, thanks. It was most awfully good of you to come. You don't know how you have cheered me up."

"Shall I send you in an evening paper? I can put it in the post-box."

"Thanks; it would be very good if you would."

Anne nodded gaily, and departed.

And the fates, ever on the watch to be malevolent and inopportune, so decreed that as she closed Carroll's door she should find herself face to face with the redoubtable Mrs. Hargrave.

"Miss Stafford!" exclaimed the elder lady, in a low, shocked voice that seemed to bristle with italics and points of exclamation. "*Miss Stafford!*"

"How do you do?" said Anne calmly. "Were you coming to call upon Mr. Carroll?"

"I? Certainly not," was the stiff answer. "For what do you take me? I had come to call upon you. And as I have rung four times without an answer, I was just about to go away, when to my amazement — nay, I may say, to my *horror* — I saw you coming out of that door."

She indicated Carroll's flat as though it had been a den of lions or a nest of scorpions.

Anne opened her door, and said quietly:

"Did you want to see me about anything particular?"

"I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with you, if you can spare the time," Mrs. Hargrave answered in a glacial voice.

"Oh, certainly," Anne answered pleasantly. "Is it something I can do for you?"

Mrs. Hargrave made no reply until they were in Anne's sitting-room. Then she said, with long, incisive pauses between the words:

"Miss Stafford, I am shocked! I am more than shocked — I am appalled — simply appalled!"

"I am really very sorry," replied Anne, with a sympathetic smile. "What has shocked and appalled you?"

Mrs. Hargrave quivered violently.

"Need you ask?" she said under her breath. "If it were not for the sake of your grandmother's sister, I should not have crossed your threshold. Oh, misguided girl, where are your erring feet leading you?"

Anne lit the stove, sat down, and held out first one foot and then the other to the gradually deepening glow.

"I am so sorry," she replied cheerfully. "But I haven't the faintest idea what you mean."

Mrs. Hargrave sat up very straight in her chair.

"What!" she exclaimed, "have I not seen you with my own eyes coming out of that man's flat?"

"You have seen me coming out of Mr. Carroll's flat," Anne said coldly. "And what then?"

"What then?" repeated Mrs. Hargrave in an utterly untranslatable voice. "Are you so ignorant as to what the world will say of such proceedings? Do you think people will believe

that any virtuous girl could so compromise herself?"

Something in Mrs. Hargrave's expression made Anne break into wild, uncontrollable laughter. She simply could not help it, and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks.

Then all at once she stopped, and said seriously:

"Don't be so absurd and so melodramatic, Mrs. Hargrave. Mr. Carroll has been ill, and I went in to see if there was anything I could do for him."

"He had no right to ask you to go into his flat," said Mrs. Hargrave in a scathing voice. "No gentleman would have done it. It only shows what he is."

"He did not ask me," replied Anne shortly. "I went of my own accord."

"What?" almost shrieked Mrs. Hargrave. "You went to visit a man in his flat without his even having asked you? Well, of all the indelicate, unmaidenly things to do! It is a wonder the man didn't insult you. But perhaps he did. And if so, you have no one but yourself to thank ——"

"Mr. Carroll did not insult me," interrupted Anne quietly, but with an ominous flash in her dark eyes.

"It is a marvel, then," snarled the elder

woman. "A man like that, who is in hiding for who knows what unspeakable crime——"

Anne rose to her feet.

"Will you go, please?" she said in a low, clear voice that was not quite steady. "How dare you speak of any friend of mine in that way! You — who pretend to be a Christian!"

"My poor girl, it is because I am a Christian that even the appearance of evil is abhorrent to me. I speak only for your good. You know what men are — or, if you don't, you should be guided by those who do. You, a not unattractive young girl, alone in the flat of a young man of questionable reputation! What is inferred? The worst."

Anne actually stamped her foot.

"Will you kindly leave my flat?" she said in a low, furious voice. "I refuse to listen to your loathsome, horrible insinuations any longer. It is disgusting, evil-thinking minds like yours that make most of the mischief in the world. Will you go at once, please?" she added, going towards the door, "or I shall forget myself, and perhaps say more than I ought to say."

Mrs. Hargrave, with great dignity, prepared to depart.

"Well, thank Heaven, I have done my duty," she said piously. "I have done what I could. If the brand refuses to be plucked from the burn-

ing, I cannot be held responsible. Good-by, Miss Stafford; I fear I cannot risk my reputation by calling upon you again."

"I am exceedingly glad," replied Anne, with scant courtesy. "Good-by." And she closed the door abruptly. "Horrible, low-minded old beast!" she muttered between her teeth as she went back into her room again. "I suppose I've made an enemy of her for life now. However, I don't care."

Then a sudden idea for a short story came to her, and she sat down and wrote for a couple of hours without stopping.

"It's not bad," she murmured approvingly, as she read it over, when she had pinned the pages together. "It's not at all bad. I'll read it to Mr. Carroll to-morrow."

In the evening Elfie Charteris came in to say that "mummy had got three new hats, and wanted Miss Stafford to come and tell her which she looked worst in."

So Anne went, and found Mrs. Charteris revolving discontentedly before her looking-glass, with a side-mirror in one hand and a hatpin in the other.

"Oh, there you are, Anne," she exclaimed. "Do come and tell me which of these caricatures of hats you think the least appalling. They've just come from Madame Rolf, and I think they

are absolutely atrocious. Alfred and I were to have dined at the Desboroughs' to-night, but I've just had a wire saying Mr. Desborough has had a fit, so, of course, the dinner can't come off. Alfred has gone to dine at his club, and I've had tea and toast. What *do* you think of this thing, Anne?"

And she turned slowly round and round.

"To be frank, I don't like it," confessed Anne, surveying with distaste the immense green wheel trimmed with purple feathers that disfigured her friend's pretty head.

"I knew it," cried Frances, flinging the atrocity on the bed. "And both the others are worse."

"I should send them all back," said Anne, when she had examined the two remaining hats. "They are hideous."

"But that's just what I can't do," wailed Frances. "I owe Madame Rolf no end of a bill, and every now and then she sends me horrors like those. I'm certain they are hats she can't sell to anyone else. I dare say she'll charge three guineas each for them. I shouldn't care if they were pretty or becoming."

"But must you take them?" asked Anne. "I shouldn't."

"I must. If I sent them back she'd turn nasty, and send in a bill six feet long. It can't

be helped. I shall sell them for fifteen shillings each to a little milliner in West Street. She'll advertise them among other things as being 'part of the trousseau of a lady of title.' There are people, I have heard, who delight in wearing the cast-off clothing of people with handles to their names."

"But why not pay Madame Rolf's bill, and have done with her?" remonstrated Anne. "I shouldn't go on ordering hats from anyone who concocts horrors like those."

"Pay her bill!" laughed Frances shrilly. "I wish I could. But, unhappily, I could as easily fly over the moon. Oh, Anne — dear, humdrum, bob-along-easy Anne, you've no idea of the worries of keeping your head up in society."

"No, thank goodness," was the dry answer. "In my humble walk of life I can both pay for my hats and choose them."

"Now, Anne, don't be horrid. There, let's talk of something else. I wonder if you'd be a dear, and do something for me? Do say yes."

"I'd like to know what it is first," laughed Anne. "If it's to wear one of these hats, I'm afraid I can't."

"No, I should think not. It's nothing quite so trying. But Alfred and I are going over to Monte or somewhere for a couple of weeks or

so, and I'm going to shut up the flat and give the maids a holiday ——"

"And you want me to take Elfie," put in Anne quickly. "I shall be delighted."

"No, but wait. I had arranged that Elfie was to go down to a little village in Wales for a fortnight with her old governess, Miss Fanshawe, and I had written to take rooms in a cottage for them; and now I have had a letter from Miss Fanshawe saying she can't go, as she is in bed with a very sore throat. So the question is — will *you* go down with Elfie, like a dear?"

Anne hesitated.

"Of course, you would let me take your return ticket," went on Frances. "And you would be my guest, just as Miss Fanshawe would have been. But it would be doing me such a favor if you would. There's no one I could trust to send her with, and the child really wants a change. And it would be a nice change for you too."

"I can't pretend I shouldn't like it, because I should," said Anne. "But I would rather pay my own fare, and ——"

"Ah now, Anne," implored Frances. "Don't be difficult. Don't you see that if you won't go — and I can't let you go if you talk nonsense about paying fares and things — I shall either have to trust Elfie to a total stranger, or to take

her with me, which is utterly out of the question. Do say you will, Anne."

"You dear thing!" said Anne, as she stooped to kiss the other's pretty flushed face. "I believe you've just arranged the whole thing to give me a holiday. And I can't allow it, Frances — I can't indeed."

"No, really," exclaimed Frances eagerly. "I'll show you Miss Fanshawe's letter. Let me see, where did I put it? Oh, here it is. Now read it for yourself, you unbelieving thing. The rooms are taken for the day after to-morrow."

Anne read Miss Fanshawe's pencilled scrawl. Then she said uncertainly:

"But I've no clothes. I mean, there's so little time ——"

"My dear, you don't want any clothes in Blasyllan. Any old rags will do. And anything you want washed the woman of the cottage will do beautifully. Elfie and Miss Fanshawe were there last year, you know. So don't make any more objections — there's a cherub. So now it's settled? You don't *know* what a weight it's taken off my mind. I'll come with you to Paddington, and take your tickets and see you off. So you'll have no trouble, except just to look after Elfie."

"It is most awfully good of you, Frances,"

said Anne in a low voice. "It will be perfectly delightful."

"Nonsense! the goodness is all on your side. I was terrified to death in case you'd refuse."

"Well — I feel as if I ought to. But it's too tempting. However, I had better be off now. I'd no idea it was so late. Thank you a thousand times, Frances. Good-night."

"Good-night. Thank you — you duck."

CHAPTER VII

On the following afternoon Anne — undeterred by the fear of Mrs. Hargrave's disapproval — kept her promise of going to have tea with Carroll.

"You look ever so much better," she said, when they had exchanged greetings.

"Possibly because I have shaved, and otherwise paid some little attention to my toilette in general. You caught me unawares yesterday, and in such a fit of the blues that I felt callously indifferent to all mundane things."

"Into whose arms do you think I fell yesterday as I closed your door?" asked Anne, as she sat down.

"Not into the 'Christian-talking lady's,' surely," said Carroll, looking amused.

"Yes, no other. She seems to think I have forfeited all claim upon her acquaintanceship," went on Anne, with a gurgling laugh.

"Well, that will be rather a boon, won't it?" said Carroll, as he measured out the tea.

"A priceless boon. But she really is a most objectionable and evil-minded person. Certainly,

the 'charity that thinketh no evil' doesn't make much of a show in her conversation. Oh, you have muffins. How nice of you! I love muffins, indigestible though they may be."

"I am sure your digestion is all it ought to be," he said gravely. "Therefore I knew I might venture upon muffins. I have, also, you will notice, provided rich seed-cake."

"We will look upon it as a kind of farewell feast," returned Anne. "Two lumps of sugar, please."

"A farewell feast?" he repeated. "Why?"

"Because I am going away to-morrow," she answered.

"Going away? But you said nothing of this yesterday?"

"No," was the answer in a stifled voice. "But I had not seen Mrs. Hargrave then."

"Anne — what on earth do you mean? Is it possible that that old harridan has said anything to annoy you seriously — to distress you?"

She did not answer. And Carroll went over to her, and bent his head to look into her averted face.

"You little wretch!" he exclaimed in a tone of mingled annoyance and relief, as she looked up at him with laughing eyes. "For the moment I thought you were in earnest."

"Well, I couldn't help it," she said, still dim-

pling. "You looked so unutterably solemn. As if I cared a pin for old Hargrave and her ideas of propriety!"

"But what did you mean, then, by saying you are going away to-morrow?"

"I simply meant that I am going away to-morrow. As a matter of fact, I am going to take little Elfie Charteris down to Wales in place of her old governess, who is ill, and can't go."

"To Wales," repeated Carroll discontentedly. "And for how long?"

"A fortnight, I think," she answered in a tranquil voice. "This is awfully nice tea, do you know. I wonder where you get it?"

"At the Stores. And do you really want to go to this place in Wales?"

"I do. I am looking forward to it very much indeed."

"Oh!" he said. "Have another muffin. And what about me?"

"About you? I don't know. I don't think you are on in this scene."

"Seemingly not," he answered somewhat curtly.

He looked what Anne mentally called "huffy," as he helped himself to a second cup of tea. So she said in an ingratiating voice:

"Mr. Carroll, I want to ask your advice."

Every man is pleased when a young and pretty

woman askes his advice. Therefore, Carroll's brow cleared a little as he said formally:

"I shall be delighted."

"I wrote a short story yesterday," Anne continued. "And I wondered if you would let me read it to you, and if you think it good, advise me where to send it."

"Certainly. I am glad the writing-fever has gripped you again. Have you the manuscript with you?"

"Yes. No, thank you, no more tea, nor muffins, nor cake. I have made a gigantic meal, and you know it. Yes, of course you can smoke."

She unrolled her manuscript, and began to read.

What the story was does not matter. It held Carroll's attention, and he pronounced it good.

"First-rate!" he said. "A wonderful improvement on your last. I wish you would let me place it for you. Will you leave it with me? That is, if you will trust me with it?"

"Of course I will. I shall be only too glad. Now, I must go. I have some packing to do."

"When do you start?" he asked, frowning.

"The cab is to be here at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. Mrs. Charteris is coming to Paddington with us."

"This is good-by, then," he said, looking

down at her with an odd expression in his handsome eyes.

"Yes — good-by for a fortnight. It will soon pass."

"For you, yes. Anne — you will write to me?" he asked, a certain masterfulness in his voice.

"Oh, I don't know. Why should I? I shall probably have nothing to say."

"Nonsense! You can at least tell me if you are well and happy. Promise me, Anne."

"Very well. Only my letters will be very short. I always was a worm as far as letter-writing is concerned."

"And — you will think of me sometimes?" he went on, taking both her hands in his.

"I shall have to think of you, if I am going to write to you," she answered, smiling up at him. "And you will take care of yourself, won't you? and get strong and well as soon as you can?"

"I don't know," was the moody answer. "I don't feel up to much yet, I can tell you."

"What a boy you are!" she said. "To be frank, you know very well that you are just a tiny bit vexed that I am going away before you are quite yourself again."

"Well, I dare say you are not far wrong," he replied, with a short, embarrassed laugh.

"And yet, of course, I have no right to be vexed, except the right of our friendship. However, you have promised to write. Good-by — little friend Anne."

"Good-by — big friend Brian."

And with a nod and a blush she was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

On the afternoon of Anne's departure, Carroll, for the first time since he had been an inmate of Colecourt Mansions, had a visitor. The visitor was a man about his own age — that is to say, midway between thirty and forty — tall and lanky, with a hatchet face and very blue eyes.

"Hallo, Carroll!" he said, in a lazy, rather drawling voice, as Carroll opened the door. "So I've unearthed you at last."

A look of genuine pleasure sprang into Carroll's face as he grasped the new-comer's hand, and almost dragged him in.

"Barney!" he exclaimed. "Good old Barney! How did you find me out? And when did you get back?"

"I got back three or four days ago," replied the other, as he dropped into a chair and took out his cigarette-case. "I found you out — through the sub-editor of a magazine. Read an article when I was in Ceylon that I could have sworn you had written, though it was signed

'Norman Stone.' Went to the office, and got your former address. The editor was out of town, or perhaps I mightn't have been so successful. Well, as I said, I got your old address in Gower Street, and they directed me here."

"It's awfully good to see you again, old chap!" said Carroll cordially. "I hardly expected you, though."

"Why not?"

Carroll shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you seen any of my people?" he asked.

"Yes. I've seen your cousin Adeline."

"Well — I suppose she gave you a categorical list of my sins and shortcomings?"

"She told me a lot of balderdash, of which I could make neither head nor tail. Brian — you surely don't expect me to believe that you — *you!* — forged your father's name? It's too ridiculous on the face of it."

"I can't deny it," the other answered quietly. "And I am sure Adeline Clinton did her best to make it clear to you that there was no room for doubt in the matter."

"You know my opinion of Adeline Clinton," was the laconic rejoinder.

"Besides, the thing is fairly well known," resumed Carroll, with an impatient movement of his head. "You will discover that when you

have heard the verdicts of a few more of my relatives and friends," he added bitterly.

"And is that why you have elected to live this hermit life, and chucked all your former haunts, and played the fool generally?"

"I don't know about playing the fool. I got rather tired of being cut dead in various degrees of superciliousness. It palls upon one after a time."

"And your mother?" said Barney, in a deliberate voice. "Does she believe you guilty of such a low-down crime?"

Carroll's brows contracted.

"She could hardly do otherwise," he answered. "I have admitted to her that — that she has every right to consider me guilty."

Barney Musgrave looked at him squarely.

"It's like you," he said, a curiously affectionate light in his clear blue eyes. "It's Brian all over."

"I suppose you know what you are talking about," observed Carroll, raising his eyebrows. "I don't."

"No? Well, that's all right. So we may take it that there are only two people who believe you to be innocent. Is that so?"

Carroll looked up quickly.

"Two?" he repeated. "You, of course, I know would be the loyal old chap you have

always been — in the teeth of the most damning evidence. And — well, yes, I dare say there is one other," he added, a faint, tender smile just touching the corners of his lips.

Barney suppressed an inclination to whistle.

"Ah! then there are three of us," he said pleasantly. "I was only thinking of two — myself and that hypocritical rat, your brother Felix. I'll swear he believes in your innocence — and for a damned good reason."

Carroll flushed a deep red, then became rather pale. But he only said, with a brief laugh:

"If you hadn't been a mighty hunter, Barney, you could have had a brilliant career as a novelist. Your imagination is startling."

Barney gazed at the ceiling.

"I saw your father at one of the clubs," he said, apropos of nothing, it seemed. "The poor old man looked a good deal aged, I thought. I also saw your mother at one of the theatres, looking absolutely radiant, and younger than ever."

"I'm glad of that," Carroll answered, in a low voice.

Barney rose.

"Well, I must be off," he said. "I've an appointment at five-thirty. What about asking me to come and dine with you to-night?"

"I shall be delighted. Come about half-past

seven," returned Carroll heartily. "And look here, Barney, we'll drop the matter of my ostracism, if you don't mind. It's not a subject that is specially interesting to me."

"All right, old Quixote. If you like to paint yourself black I suppose it's your own affair. You're looking a good deal off color, you know. I don't think playing at criminal suits you."

"Influenza," was the brief answer.

"Ah, good old influenza! It's a wonderfully handy scapegoat. Well, so long."

When he had gone, Carroll flung himself on the sofa, and lay for a long time staring at the ceiling, his arms crossed behind his head.

As a rule, of late, when he had given himself up to desultory thought, Anne had figured rather largely in his meditations. But his present reflections excluded her altogether. For they dealt with a time before she had come into his life.

There was something rather fine in his expression just now, as he lay there in the waning light. He did not look like a man who could have committed the crime of which he had practically confessed himself guilty. Some crimes might have been possible to him, doubtless. But not that particular one. At least, so one would have said.

After a time he rose, unlocked a drawer in

his writing-table, and took out a photograph. It was of a wonderfully pretty woman, dark-eyed and piquant, with an exquisite figure, and beautifully poised head and shoulders. The face bore a curious resemblance to Carroll himself.

Carroll looked at it for a minute or two; then, with a sigh, replaced it in the drawer, and turned the key sharply.

CHAPTER IX

BLASYLLAN is a tiny sleepy village on the coast of Cardiganshire. It is half hidden in the deep curve of a sandy bay, and its houses barely number a dozen and a half all told. There is no railway station nearer than Caerurydd, and the only public conveyance from there to Blasyllan is a rattling, jolting coach, which might be a hundred, or even two hundred, years old, as far as its appearance and comfort are concerned.

But the six miles of road that the antiquated coach traverses twice a day run through scenery that is as near fairyland as anything we are likely to see in this world.

It was an afternoon of brilliant sunshine when Anne and Elfie settled themselves with sighs of content in the absurd old vehicle, and spring seemed almost to have identified herself, for the day, with summer.

They were quite an hour in reaching Blasyllan, which consists of one long, winding street of quaintly fashioned cottages of one or two stories

— never more — and set very far apart. Their particular cottage was the last but three. It was a cosy-looking little place, with a projecting thatched roof, and queer latticed windows overhung with close-growing ivy. It had a well-kept garden, gay with daffodils, jonquils, and narcissi. An abnormally fat spaniel sat at the gate, and barked in a curiously shrill falsetto as the coach stopped.

A plump woman in a stiff violet print gown came bustling down the path.

"Be quiet, Araminta," she said, addressing the spaniel reprovingly.

"How are you, Mrs. Pugh?" said Elfie, allowing herself to be kissed and embraced. "This is a friend of mummy's — Miss Stafford. She's kindly come to look after me, as Miss Fanshawe is ill."

Mrs. Pugh curtsied respectfully to Anne, and hoped she would find everything to her liking.

"Missy has grown," she added. "But there — young things do grow, bless their hearts, and only natural."

Elfie darted here and there, renewing her acquaintance with the familiar haunts of a year ago. She insisted on Anne climbing a ladder in the hen-house to view a place where there had "always been six eggs, Anne — every single day." She took her into the back-garden — a

sunlit, dreamy place which merged itself in a shadowy wood beyond — and with lowered voice and uplifted finger showed her a well in which dwelt a wonderful toad.

"Mr. Pugh says it's more than a hundred years old," whispered the child importantly. "And it has the most lovely eyes."

After tea they went down to the shore, and looked for shells. And quite early they went to bed, for both were tired.

"Won't we have times!" chuckled Elfie as Anne covered her up in the little white bed alongside her own. "You dear Anne — I'm ever so glad you came."

And with a sleepy croon of delight she turned round, and went to sleep almost directly.

The next two days were spent almost entirely out of doors. The weather was beyond all praise, bright and mild, with the merest ghost of a breeze. But on the third day the weather changed, and Elfie caught a feverish cold, which became worse so rapidly that Anne kept her in bed, and sent for the nearest doctor, who lived about four miles away.

He seemed to think there was some danger of inflammation of the lungs, and said the child must be kept in bed in the meantime, and nursed with great care. He offered to send a competent nurse from Caerurydd, but Anne said she was

sure she could do all that was necessary, especially as the little invalid was very fond of her, and was rather difficult to manage.

So Dr. Jones wrote two prescriptions, which he offered to leave at the chemist's in Caerurydd as he passed, gave Anne explicit instructions as to treatment, etc., and promised to come on the following morning.

He was a pleasant, kindly man, and Anne felt sorry when he drove away.

As the day waned, and a chilly, damp breeze blew up from the sea, an unconquerable depression seized upon Anne, and would not be shaken off. Elfie had fallen into a troubled sleep. Her sweet small face was flushed and yet pinched-looking. Anne's heart ached with anxiety.

She had already written a note to the child's mother, telling her what the doctor had said, and what he feared. This note she had addressed to Colecourt Mansions, as Mrs. Charteris had not as yet sent her address. A letter might come from her in the morning, to be sure. But in that case she could write again. Or, if need be, she could ask Dr. Jones to wire from Caerurydd.

It was growing dark now, and she lit a candle. Then, as Elfie still slept, she sat down, and tried to do some sewing. But after a few minutes she flung it down, and, taking out her writing-

case, wrote a few lines to Brian Carroll. At least, she at first intended it only to be a few lines. But it grew into a rather long and somewhat forlorn letter. As she signed her name a scratching came to the door, and when she opened it Araminta waddled slowly in. She was an affectionate dog, and Anne welcomed her as a sympathetic companion. A few minutes later Mrs. Pugh knocked at the door to ask if she could be of any use.

"I dare say the poor little dear will pull through," she said consolingly. "Children are wonderful for picking up again, even when they're at the very last gasp, which missy isn't, bless her. Now, don't you let yourself get downhearted, Miss Stafford. Though, I dare say, the responsibility weighs on you, which is only likely. I had a little niece, just missy's age, lay for days in what the doctors called a state of comic. Though it was anything but comic for her mother, who was half out of her mind. And the child recovered all at once, as one might say, and took the first prize in elocution — not directly, of course, but later on." Here the good woman paused, then went on. "If you want that letter posted, miss, my nephew from Caerurydd is just going back in his cart now, and he'll post it so that it catches the early morning train."

Anne thanked her, and accepted her offer to

sit with Elfie while she went into the next room to have supper. It was raining heavily now, and the heavens were without a star. Anne closed the window, and stood for a few minutes looking at the swiftly darkening sea and sky. Then she made a very sketchy meal, and hurried back to her little charge.

Next day, however, things looked rather brighter. The sun shone cheerily. And Dr. Jones said Elfie seemed decidedly better. On the following day the small invalid was allowed to sit up for an hour or so in the sitting-room.

"I can't think how I was such a silly little ass as to catch cold," she observed discontentedly, when two more days had passed. "Fancy losing all these days. But I suppose I shall be allowed to go out to-morrow?" she added, with wistful eyes.

"I'm afraid not. But we'll see what the doctor says," said Anne diplomatically.

"Fancy how awkward if I had died," went on Elfie, after a pause. "What *should* you have done, Anne?"

"My dear child, I haven't the slightest idea," Anne replied, with a little shiver.

But Dr. Jones, who was of the old school of medicine, thought it would be unadvisable for Elfie to venture out of doors for a day or two, in spite of the glorious weather. And Elfie, who

was sure that it would do her good to sit in the garden, and who was unused to being crossed in any way, was exceedingly naughty and troublesome, and cried until both her own head and Anne's ached severely.

Anne was not sorry when the sobbing and scolding little creature was in bed at last, and had succumbed, very unwillingly, to sleep.

She went out into the garden, and stood leaning against the moss-grown gate in the soft April moonlight. She rather wondered that she had not heard from Carroll. He had made such a point of her writing that she had half expected he would answer by return of post. He must have received her letter on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning at the latest. And now it was Friday night.

Her head was aching furiously, as I have said, and she was tired, for her night's rest had been much broken during the past week. And a queer sense of dreariness was upon her. As a matter of fact, she was homesick, she told herself — deadly homesick. Blasyllan was a lovely place, and the scenery was exquisite. But she was beginning to hate it. And she had had a letter from Frances Charteris by the afternoon post (Blasyllan's latest innovation), asking her to take the cottage for another fortnight, so that Elfie might be quite recovered before returning to

town, and imploring her to be a dear, good Anne, and look after "the kiddie" for a couple of weeks longer. Monte was very full, the weather perfect, etc., etc.

Dear old London! Anne thought with a sigh, how pleasant and sunny it must be looking in this glorious spring weather. The moon would be shining in at her sitting-room window, one long ray just touching the middle shelf of the bookcase.

"I never will leave home again," she resolved, leaning her elbows on the gate, and winking hard to keep back unruly and old-fashioned tears. "Never — never."

A cuckoo-clock from the cottage kitchen announced the hour of eight. The tide was nearly full, and the moon shone brilliantly on the ripple of the waves, and on the winding village street. A man and a dog were coming leisurely down the street. They came nearer, and the dog ran forward with a sharp bark of welcome. Anne rubbed her eyes in bewilderment — as if she were hardly quite certain if she were really awake.

But there was no doubt of it. It was Boxer — and Boxer's master.

Anne opened the gate, and ran out into the road.

"Oh, Brian," she exclaimed in rather a for-

lorn little voice, "how very, very glad I am to see you!"

"That's all right, then," he answered, taking both her hands in the warm clasp of his. "Boxer and I were not altogether sure whether or not we might be welcome."

He noticed that she had called him Brian, and wondered if she was aware she had done so. But she was not. Nor, possibly, was she aware of the unmistakable welcome that had lit up her soft eyes.

"Do come in," she said. "Elfie is in bed. She has been just a little trying all day. Have you had supper?"

"Yes. I have taken a couple of rooms at the other end of the village for a week," he answered as he walked beside her up the garden path. "When I got your letter I had a feeling that it was hardly the thing for you to be stranded here with the care of a sick child who has no particular claim upon you. So I packed a bag, left Mrs. Watkins to scrub out the flat, and here we are."

"But did you really come just because of me?" Anne asked. "It was awfully good of you."

"Oh, well, I had rather a longing for sea air for myself," he answered, smiling down at her. "Let us sit here," he added, as they came to a

rustic bench a few yards from the porch. "It is too fine to go indoors. I mustn't stay long, though. I suppose it's quite late for Blasyllan. But I want to look at you, Anne. It seems to me that you are looking far too pale and thin. Or is it the moonlight?"

"The moonlight, perhaps. For you, too, are pale," she replied, in a voice that was almost gay.

Here Araminta came out and gazed sleepily at Boxer, who, in his turn, inspected her with polite curiosity, as though she had been some interesting museum specimen. Then they sat down and conversed in dog-fashion for some minutes with surprising amiability. When they were satisfied as to one another's respectability, they promptly went to sleep.

"It seems so strange to see you here," said Anne presently.

"You are really glad to see me, then?" he asked.

"I am really very glad. Do you know, I believe I was a wee bit homesick."

"Poor little girl!" he answered. "Your letter gave me that impression."

"Why didn't you answer it?"

"I have answered it — in person."

Then they both laughed. Perhaps because they were both rather happy.

"Why don't you ask me if I have missed you?" he said, after a brief interval of silence.

"I don't know. Did you miss me?"

"Frightfully. Your flat seemed like a little tomb. Boxer and I hurried past it as if it had been haunted."

"You are quite well again now, are you not?" she asked.

"Anne — I am not in the least well," was the reproachful answer. "I have come down here to be nursed and petted, and made much of generally. I am an influenza convalescent. And you know what that means."

"How absurd you are!" smiled Anne.

"Yes, I know. Welsh air always has that effect upon me. What do you do with yourself all day here?"

"Well, for the last week I haven't done much except nurse poor little Elfie."

"What awfully hard lines! However, we must make up for it during the next week. How is the little one?"

"She is really almost well, only the doctor doesn't want her to go out for a day or two."

"Well, I shall be head of the nursing department now. You are not looking nearly so well as when you left town, you know."

"Oh, well, I have been worried. And then —

of course, I hadn't much sleep for a night or two."

"Upon my soul, it is too bad! I think it was quite time I came. Anne — you are sure you are glad I came? Tell me. I want to know."

She colored fitfully in the moonlight.

"Didn't I look glad?" she asked.

"Yes, you did. But — I have a feeling that if it had been anyone else, you would have looked just as glad."

"Oh no, I shouldn't. You see, you represent London, and my dear little flat, and — oh, a host of things!"

"Then you were not glad to see me for myself, Anne? I knew it. I felt sure of it."

"Don't be analytical and introspective. Let us enjoy the present, without abstruse inquiry."

"You are a cold-hearted little thing, Anne. You don't care in the least that I have been worrying and fretting about you for all these days."

"It was very nice of you. Perhaps I, too, have been worrying and fretting about you," she said, with a demure smile.

"I wish I thought you had been doing anything half so kind and gratifying," he answered, somewhat ruefully.

A little later, when he had gone, and Anne was

preparing for bed, she found herself humming a lilting tune under her breath as she brushed her hair. Her homesickness seemed to have vanished. She told herself that it was because she was so thankful that Elfie was a little better.

"Who do you think has come?" she asked the child next morning, as they breakfasted.

"Mummy," was the listless answer.

"No, not mummy."

"Daddy, then" — this in a rather more animated tone.

"No, not daddy."

"Well, I don't know. Why, Anne, is it somebody belonging to you? Yes, it must be. Your cheeks are quite pink."

"No, nobody belonging to me," protested Anne, her cheeks a shade pinker still.

"Oh, I know!" cried Elfie excitedly. "It is Mr. Carroll. I dreamed he came. Is it Mr. Carroll?"

Anne nodded.

"How perfectly lovely!" said Elfie. "Did he come because I was ill?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Did you write and tell him?"

"Yes."

"Isn't he kind?" murmured Elfie. "*What* a daddy he would make!"

To Elfie's inconceivable delight, Carroll and

Boxer appeared about eleven o'clock with a bath-chair.

"Yes, it is for you, Elfie," said Carroll, in answer to the child's excited questionings. "At least, I think it must be. It certainly isn't for Miss Stafford, or for me. Where did I get it? Well, that is a secret. Perhaps fairies sent it. In any case, I should get in, if I were you, in case they come and take it away again."

"But the doctor?" demurred Anne. "Hadn't we better wait until he says she may go out?"

"I am the doctor," said Carroll inflexibly. "I say she may go out. I say she *must* go out. Come along, Elfie."

"Are you going to wheel it?" chuckled the child, as she climbed in.

"I am going to wheel it," he answered. "Are you ready, Anne?"

"Where are we going?" asked Elfie, as the little cavalcade set out.

"You mustn't ask. You'll see when we get there."

"Oh, you are nice, Mr. Carroll. You are so funny. I said to Anne only this morning what a nice daddy you would make. And she thinks so too."

"Does she? I am glad of that."

The bathchair finally came to an anchor in a far-away corner of the bay, where quantities of

glistening shells lay half-hidden in the powdery sand.

Anne seated herself on a flat stone, and drew a piece of fancy-work from a small bag she carried on her arm. Carroll took off his hat, and threw himself down on the sand beside her.

"Tell me about foreign countries," said Elfie, as she lay back among her cushions with a sigh of content. "Tell about all the foreign places where you've been."

"How do you know I've been to foreign countries?" he asked lazily.

"Because Anne told me. She says you've been everywhere."

"Not quite everywhere."

"Have you ever been on the same island as Robinson Crusoe?"

"Not the same island. I've been on a desert island, though."

"*Have* you? How awfully jolly! And did you like it?"

"No, I didn't," was the brief answer.

"Didn't you have enough to eat?"

"Not nearly."

"How awful!" exclaimed Elfie, with round, pitying eyes. "And what did you do?"

"What one always has to do on a desert island — waited until a ship came."

"But how did they know you were there? Did you hoist signals, like they do in books?"

"No. They came ashore for water."

"It must be awful — not to have enough to eat," said the child, in a low voice.

"It isn't nice, of course," agreed Carroll, as he struck a match.

"I should just simply have lain down and died," said Elfie decidedly.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. There's something about a desert island that makes you feel very much alive. Dying is the very last thing you think of doing."

"Well, I should certainly sob and scream," announced the child, shaking her curly head. "But, of course, I suppose you didn't, as you're grown up."

"I'm grown up," put in Anne. "And I'm very sure I should sob and scream if I found myself on a desert island. I don't know that I should mind not having enough to eat. It is the loneliness that would terrify me."

"Yes, it's pretty ghastly," admitted Carroll. "But what I felt most was the want of something to smoke."

"How long were you there?" asked Elfie.

"About a week, I think."

"I should have been either a gibbering idiot or a raving lunatic," shivered Anne. "I

shouldn't have minded the days so much. But the nights! Horrible!"

"Did wild beasts come?" inquired Elfie.

"No — not one," Carroll answered regretfully.

"Nor snakes — nor anything?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Elfie. But not a single snake of any kind showed itself while I was there. Nor any alarming bird or beast or reptile."

"It must have been a very *ordinary* kind of desert island," observed Elfie, in a tone of distinct disparagement.

"I'm afraid it must have been," laughed Carroll.

"Perhaps all desert islands are like that," said the child dreamily. "And perhaps the people just invent about wild beasts and things after they come home."

"I dare say they invent a good deal after they come home," agreed Carroll.

"Have you ever invented things, Mr. Carroll?"

"No, I don't think so," he answered gravely. "You know, I'm rather a truthful person, Elfie."

"Are you? Then I do wish you'd tell me something."

"I will if I can."

"Well, I heard Mrs. Hargrave saying to

mummy one day that Anne ought not to make a friend of you. And I want to know why."

There was an awkward silence for perhaps half a minute. Anne's face had turned crimson. And Carroll had become rather pale. Then the latter said quietly:

"I'm afraid I can't tell you why, Elfie. Very few people, I should imagine, are worthy of Miss Stafford's friendship."

"Well, I asked mummy, and she said little girls shouldn't ask questions. After all, I'm not such a very little girl. I'm long past seven — nearly eight."

Anne stole a glance at Carroll. He was looking steadily out to sea, his face set and stern. With a sudden impulse she leaned towards him, and laid her hand on one of his. He did not speak nor turn his head, but grasped the slender fingers so tightly that he almost hurt her. But Anne did not care. She knew that the child's words had cut him sorely, and she longed to comfort him.

This little byplay was seen and noted by Elfie's sharp eyes. Indeed, there were very few things that escaped this young person's observation.

She knew at once that she had said what she ought not to have said, and that Anne was displeased with her. And when Carroll rose abruptly, and with a muttered exclamation walked

rapidly down to the far-away water's edge, the culprit puckered up her small face and began to cry.

"Oh, Anne, I'm sorry I said that," she sobbed. "I know you are angry, and that he is too. Do ask him to forgive me."

"It was a very unkind thing to say," said Anne; "and I don't wonder Mr. Carroll is annoyed. But crying won't make it any better."

She spoke rather sternly, and Elfie cried more loudly than before — so loudly, indeed, that Carroll heard her, and walked slowly back again. He seemed to have regained his normal composure, and said pleasantly:

"Why, Elfie, crying? That will never do. We shall be having you laid up again. What's the matter?"

"Oh, I'm a wicked girl," she moaned. "I'd no right to repeat what Mrs. Hargrave said to mummy. I deserve to be ill and die. Mummy always says it's dreadful to repeat things. I don't know what made me. Do forgive me. I am perfectly sure you are a nice friend for Anne or anybody else to have. And I just simply love you. So now."

"There, there! It isn't worth fretting over," he said soothingly. "As a rule, it is better not to repeat things. But in this case it doesn't really matter."

"Anne is angry," wailed the wrong-doer.

"I will ask her not to be angry," was the consoling answer. "Forgive the poor little soul, Anne. She ought not to be allowed to cry."

"How you would spoil her!" said Anne, shaking her head.

Nevertheless, she took the child in her arms and whispered that she must be a good girl, and not cry any more. But Elfie would not be comforted; and at last Carroll said:

"I wonder if I can remember the 'Ballad of the Youghy Boughy Bò'?"

"Oh yes, do," cried Elfie eagerly, as she dried her eyes. "I haven't heard it for ages; and Anne only knows the first verse."

"Well, not another tear," said Carroll, lowering himself upon the sand again.

Then he began to repeat in a monotonous voice:

"'In the middle of the woods
Dwelt the Youghy Boughy Bò.
Two old chairs and half a candle,
One old jug without a handle;
These were all his worldly goods
In the middle of the woods.

"'And he said to Lady Jingly,
"I am tired of living singly;
If you'll come and be my wife,
Quite serene would be my life."

"'Lady Jingly answered sadly,
And her tears began to flow,
"Your proposal comes too late,
Dearest Youghy Boughy Bò.
I would be your wife most gladly"
(Here she twirled her fingers madly),
"But in England I've a mate.
Yes, you've asked me far too late.

"'"Take, oh take your chair and candle,
And your jug without a handle.
I can merely be your friend,
But I'll love you to the end.
All your life you must live singly."
Thus the wail of Lady Jingly.

"'In the middle of the woods
Dwells the Youghy Boughy Bò,
Two old chairs and half a candle,
One old jug without a handle,
In the middle of the woods,
Still are all his worldly goods.'"

Elfie gave a little squirm of satisfaction.

"Poor old thing!" she sighed. "I always feel so sorry for him. Don't you, Mr. Carroll?"

"Awfully — at least, I should if I had the faintest notion what a Youghy Boughy Bò was."

"Oh, I think he was a kind of Indian," said Elfie reflectively. "And I suppose Lady Jingly was somebody far grander, that he wanted to marry, and couldn't."

"The ballad hints that she was married al-

ready," said Anne, standing up and shaking the sand from her skirts.

"I wonder if his heart broke," said Elfie, leaning her chin on her hand. "In my book of Norse tales there was a prince, and a princess didn't love him, and his heart broke. But, of course, he died."

"The worst of it is that in real life people whose hearts break don't die," observed Carroll dryly.

"What do they do, then?"

"Patch their hearts up and go on as before."

"But, of course, they'd be dreadfully unhappy," said the child pensively.

"Oh, well, most people are unhappy, more or less," replied Carroll, who appeared to be possessed with a sudden spirit of pessimism.

"Oh no," remonstrated Elfie. "I'm happy, and Anne's happy; and you must be happy, because you're a grown-up man, and can do just what you like."

"Oh no, I can't. I wish I could."

"Can't you? Daddy can."

"Ah! Happy daddy!"

Carroll was strangely silent as they slowly made their way back to the cottage, and only answered in brief monosyllables any remarks made to him.

But Elfie chattered incessantly, and seemed quite her old merry little self again.

"Won't you come in and have a very primitive dinner with us?" asked Anne, as the bath-chair stopped in front of the porch. "We always dine in the middle of the day here. But you can call it lunch, if you like."

"No, thank you, not to-day," he answered. "But I'll come in the afternoon, if I won't be a nuisance."

"He's afraid there won't be enough," said Elfie shrewdly; "but there is, because I heard Mrs. Pugh say to her husband that very likely the gentleman would stay to dinner, and that she supposed he was Miss Stafford's young man."

Anne became scarlet, and Carroll's color deepened somewhat also.

"You are outdoing yourself to-day, little one," said the latter, pulling one of her curls gently. "I think we shall have to tie up that small tongue."

"Oh, goodness! I've been repeating things again," she said in a dismayed tone.

Carroll laughed, whistled to Boxer, and took his departure.

"Dear me! I do hope I'm not becoming an unpleasant child," said Elfie during dinner, after a silence.

"I hope not," replied Anne. "Will you have some more rice-pudding?"

"No, thank you. I know quite well you're still a little angry with me, Anne dear. But I truly will try to remember not to repeat things."

"I hope you will," was the severe answer. "It is a very, very objectionable habit, and makes people feel extremely uncomfortable."

Elfie showed symptoms of whimpering.

"Perhaps 'lowances ought to be made for me, because I was ill, and had a temperture," she murmured.

She looked so pretty and winsome that Anne went round the table and kissed her.

"Poor little mite! I'm afraid I was cross," she said, smoothing the curly hair. "But it was a temperature you had, not a temperture."

"Oh, well, it was something. Anyway, it made me ill, and I might have died."

"Yes; but you didn't, you cajoling little monkey! Now you must lie down for an hour, and try to go to sleep."

"Will you sing to me?"

"Yes, if you like."

CHAPTER X

WHEN Elfie had gone to sleep, Anne took her work and went out into the sunlit garden at the back of the house.

She was looking very sweet and fair in a plainly-made holland dress and a broad, shady hat. She had more color than usual, and her dark eyes looked both soft and bright.

Besides her sewing, she had taken out a volume of "Swinburne's Poems and Ballads." She read and worked alternately, leaning her back against a big copper-beach, round which a rustic circular seat had been made by the industrious Mr. Pugh. A pencil and notebook lay on the seat beside her, lest any ideas for magazine stories should strike her.

She made a very charming picture as she sat there in the warm April sunshine — a picture thoroughly appreciated by Carroll, who came round the corner of the house just as the cuckoo-clock announced the hour of four.

"Where's the kiddie?" he asked, as he seated himself beside her.

"Asleep. Poor little thing! She is very lovable, though she is rather naughty."

"Oh, she's all right. I'm not fond of goody children. May I smoke, Anne?"

"Yes, of course." Then she added impulsively: "Mr. Carroll, you don't know how vexed I am that Elfie said what she did ——"

"Do you mean about Mrs. Pugh's surmise as to the relations between you and me?" he asked in a level voice.

"Oh *no*," she said, blushing a little. "Of course I don't meant that. But ——"

"Then Elfie's other remarks are unimportant," he answered, with a slight movement of his hand.

After a pause he continued:

"Do you remember when I came and found you leaning over the gate last night?"

"Yes," she answered, looking up at him; "of course I do. Why do you ask?"

"You did not call me 'Mr. Carroll' then, if my memory serves me."

"Oh, did I not?" she said rather uncertainly.

"You know you did not."

"Oh, well, I was startled, and, I suppose, forgot myself for the moment."

"I wish you would forget yourself permanently for the future."

"You mean you want me to call you — by your name. Well, I don't see why I shouldn't.

We are friends. And you call me by my name; and 'Brian' is a name I have always liked."

He altered his position slightly.

"Shall you be vexed if I tell you that until I knew you I considered 'Anne' rather an ugly name?" he said.

"I shall not be in the least vexed," she said, with a ripple of laughter, "because I think it is a very ugly name myself."

"Oh no, it isn't," he answered. "I have come to see that I was quite wrong. 'Anne' — it is a delightful name — so quaint, and prim, and sweet. It is the only name that you could possibly have had."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Am I all these things?" she said — "quaint, and prim, and sweet? It sounds like a Dutch garden."

"You know very well, I dare say, all the things that you are," he answered slowly. "What you do not know, perhaps, is just what you are — to me."

A curious stillness seemed to come over her. Her heart seemed to drag in its beating, and her voice sounded almost cold as she said:

"I know that we are — friends."

"Can a man and a woman be really friends, do you think?" he asked, pulling Boxer's ears absently.

"Why, yes. Haven't we proved that?"

"Have we? I wish I knew."

She wrinkled her brows in a way she had. He liked to see her do it.

"I don't understand you to-day," she said. "Your eyes and your voice are — discontented."

"I am glad they express my mood so well," he said, with a short laugh. "That is just what I am — discontented."

"I am sorry," she answered simply.

"Dear little Anne — thank you. You are always so sympathetic, to use a horribly hackneyed word. If I were in great trouble, it would be to you that I should come. And if some great joy came to me — which, by the way, is hardly likely — I should tell it to you first of all."

"I am glad," she said, folding her little hands over her work. "I believe — I am sure — that is how I feel towards you. So that, you see, we are truly friends."

"Are we, Anne? I wonder if we are less — or more."

He rose as he spoke, and called out sharply to Boxer, who was busily rooting up some bulbs in the opposite border. Anne rose, too, and folded up her work. And just then Mrs. Pugh came down the walk from the house, shading her eyes from the sun.

"Tea is ready, miss," she said; "and little

Miss Elfie is awake, and playing with the cats in the kitchen." Then she added in a quite audible aside: "I've set a place for the gentleman, miss, and put a seed-cake and an extra flower on the table."

"Will you stay to tea?" Anne asked, raising her eyes to Carroll's.

"Not to-day, thanks," he answered.

"What! — in spite of the seed-cake and the extra flower?" she said demurely.

But he shook his head.

"Another time, perhaps. Come, Boxer."

"She doesn't care a straw," he reflected, as he walked homewards along the sands. "It is only friendship with her — bless her dear, prim, innocent little heart! So, if I like to play with fire and burn my fingers in the process, nobody is hurt but myself."

He had told himself all this before. But, then, as Socrates has told us, what is true cannot be said too often.

As for Anne, she was simply letting herself drift. She was not quite sure of the nature of her feeling towards Carroll. She liked him, of course — liked him very much indeed. She never wanted to criticize him — as she had a way of criticizing, somewhat mercilessly, most people who came within her ken. She was always deeply content when he came, and vaguely

sorry when he went away. And the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand had become very sweet to her. But all these symptoms she considered the essence of the "higher friendship" — at least, she did not absolutely call it the "higher friendship," but that was what she meant. It was as far removed from the ordinary mundane friendship of other human beings as Buddhists are from the Plymouth Brethren.

She was rather absent-minded at tea-time, and little Elfie, after looking at her curiously for some minutes, said:

"Are you thinking about Mr. Carroll, Anne? You keep smiling and smiling, so funnily."

"You foolish Elfie!" Anne answered, with a faint accession of color. "Why should I be thinking of Mr. Carroll because I was smiling?"

"I don't know. I just kind of felt you were. I often think about him myself. May I have another piece of seed-cake?"

"You dreadful child! You have had three pieces already," demurred Anne.

"Yes, I know; but Mrs. Pugh said it couldn't hurt a baby," pleaded Elfie; "and I am long past being a baby." Then she added: "I wonder if Mr. Carroll will bring the bath-chair for me tomorrow."

"Perhaps he will tell us, if he comes this evening," Anne said.

But Carroll did not come that evening, and Anne was most unreasonably disappointed.

Next morning a small boy brought a note for her. It ran thus:

"I am going to Llandrygg for a couple of days. Shall see you when I return."

"B. L. C."

Anne was conscious of a keen sting of disappointment, for which she took herself severely to task. Elfie openly bewailed this unlooked-for defection on the part of her "dear Mr. Carroll," as she called him.

"Nonsense!" said Anne briskly. "He will be back before we have time to turn round."

"Oh, Anne!" the child remonstrated, regarding her with reproachful eyes. "We shall have time to turn round thousands of times in two days."

Just then Dr. Jones appeared, and pronounced his little patient wonderfully improved — indeed, to all intents and purposes, quite well.

"Nothing wanted now but ordinary care, my dear Miss Stafford," he said, as Anne walked down to the gate with him. "Of course, dampness and any chill must be avoided; but otherwise she may resume her usual ways again."

"You have been very kind," Anne said, looking up at him with grave, direct eyes. "I shall never forget how kind you were the first day or two she was ill. I felt so very anxious and lonely."

The doctor fumbled awkwardly with his horse's bridle. Then he cleared his throat, and said, without looking at her:

"I am a plain man, Miss Stafford, and I have not much in any way to offer an attractive young woman. But if you would care to be the wife of a country doctor — why, I can promise you a — a devotion and affection as strong and lasting, perhaps, as that of a much younger man."

There was a silence for a few seconds. And then Anne became conscious that she was staring at him in literally open-mouthed amazement.

At last she stammered:

"Dr. Jones — there must be some mistake. I don't quite understand ——"

"I am asking you to marry me," he said, his ruddy colour fading somewhat.

"But," she faltered, "you don't know me. You have only seen me about half a dozen times."

"We can soon remedy that," he answered sturdily, "if you'll only just give me a word or two to go on with. If you think you might get to care for me — in time."

"Oh no," she said; "I never could. I couldn't care for you at all in that way. I truly am very, very sorry, but ——"

"Well, well, that's all right. It can't be helped, I suppose," the doctor put in hastily. "I haven't had much time in my life to think about women. But it seemed to me that you had all the qualities that a doctor's wife ought to have. However, if you don't want to marry me, it can't be helped, and there's an end of it. Anyhow, I shall always be glad I've met you. And if there's anything at any time that I can do for you, I hope you'll let me know."

With the last words he sprang into his saddle, shook his horse's reins, and was gone.

Elfie emerged from behind the sweet-brier hedge.

"Did he want you to marry him?" she asked in an awestruck voice. "Oh, Anne, I'm so glad you wouldn't. Mr. Carroll would have been so angry."

Anne frowned, but made no other answer.

The day passed uneventfully. Anne sat with a book and her work on the sand, and Elfie built sand-castles, and made Anne tell her stories about them. They only went indoors for meals, and came out again directly afterwards. And the next day they did exactly the same. The weather was almost as warm as summer, and Elfie con-

fided to Anne that she felt exactly as if she were in heaven.

When Elfie had gone to bed, tired out and happy, Anne, who was rather tired, too, sat at the open window of the sitting-room, and gazed dreamily out at the sea.

She wondered if Carroll had come home. He had said he was going away for two days. Well, this was the second day.

And as she wondered, she saw his tall, erect figure coming along the piece of road that lay between the Pughs' cottage and the next.

Her heart beat as she heard him unlatch the gate and close it gently again behind him. But she did not go to meet him, as she had done that first night. She sat still and waited.

He came up to the window, and sat down on a little seat that was immediately underneath it. And their hands met across the window-sill.

Boxer, after a brief wag of his tail, as an acknowledgment of Anne's presence, went round to the kitchen, to call upon Araminta, whom he regarded as a curio.

"Almost like summer, isn't it?" said Carroll, without other greeting.

"Yes," she answered. "Lovely."

"I've come back, you see," he went on, after a pause.

"Yes," she said, dimpling. "That is fairly

obvious. You are too substantial for a ghost." Then, after a pause, she added: "Did you have a good time?"

"No, not specially. I didn't go with the object or the expectation of having a good time."

"It sounds as though you had been to the dentist's," she said.

"Don't be flippant. It sounds unlike you," he answered shortly.

"As far as my recollection goes there is nothing at all flippant about going to the dentist's," she murmured.

He was silent. For the first time her mood jarred upon him. For he was feeling rather wretched, and her tone seemed to him heartless.

And she was flippant only because she was nervous, and because she was so overwhelmingly glad to have him back again, and because she did not want him to see how glad she was.

It was almost dark. The small oval of her pearl-pale face shone upon him from the dusky shadows of the sitting-room, and her eyes appeared to him almost black and abnormally large.

"It — it was rather lonely without you," she said in a thoughtful voice. "Elfie and I both found it so. You see, you are so big, you take up an appreciable space on one's horizon."

"Ah," he said. Then was silent.

"It is curious," she went on dreamily, "how soon one gets accustomed to people. It is not three months since we first were even acquainted with one another. And yet — we are a good deal in one another's lives."

"Three months?" he repeated. "It seems to me that I have always known you."

"Yes, it seems a long time. I wonder ——"

"Yes, Anne — what do you wonder? But I think I know. I can follow a good many of your thoughts, little girl."

"I hope not," she said quickly.

"Are they so treasonable?" he asked, and his voice held a lingering caress. "You wonder — you were going to say — if we shall ever be less to one another than we are now?"

"Well, yes," admitted Anne, "I was going to say something like that. I wonder — if we shall ever quarrel."

"If we shall ever quarrel?" he echoed. "I shouldn't be at all surprised. We have both fairly hot tempers. And we are both obstinate, and unlikely to own ourselves to be in the wrong. And we are both — oh, there are a good many things we both are that might lead to quarrels. Anne," he added, with an abrupt change of tone, "have you any idea why I went away for those two days?"

She shook her head.

"Did you wonder?" he went on.

She nodded.

"I went away," he said, in a harsh, metallic voice, "because I wanted to face a difficult problem — a problem that has become more and more difficult since I left town."

"And have you solved it?" she asked uncertainly.

"No. It baffles me. It keeps me awake at nights, and comes between me and everything else during the day."

"I suppose," she hesitated — "that I mustn't ask what it is? Don't think I say that out of mere idle curiosity; I only want to know if I can help you."

"No," he answered in rather a dreary tone, "you mustn't know. Not you — of all people."

"A mouse once helped a lion," she said whimsically.

He smiled slightly.

"I'm afraid this mouse couldn't help this lion," he answered. Then he added: "However, it's a relief to talk to you, Anne — whether you know what I'm driving at or not. Forgive this dismal howl. I'm out of sorts, and not myself. It's awfully nice to be beside you again, you pale, sweet, demure little Anne. I feel I want to liken you to all sorts of things — soft, creamy, silky things, like pearls, or rose-leaves, or ——"

"Is your problem about a woman?" put in Anne suddenly and unexpectedly.

Even in the dim light she could see a wave of color sweep over his face.

"In a way — yes," he answered indistinctly, after a pause.

"A woman — that you care for?" she went on relentlessly.

He bowed his head in silent assent.

Anne's voice wavered a little as she whispered:

"Is it because of her that you are what you call 'under a cloud'?"

"Good God, no!" he exclaimed. "She has nothing to do with that."

She shivered. And he rose from his seat, and whistled to Boxer.

"It is late," he said, looking at his watch. "And you ought not to sit at this open window any longer. Have you made any plans for to-morrow?"

"No," she answered. "We are just going to moon about and enjoy ourselves."

"Do you think you could enjoy yourselves by driving with me to the Falls of Gwymnyddan. I've ordered a carriage and pair from Caerurydd to be here at ten to-morrow morning, on the chance of your caring to go."

"It would be delightful. But why a carriage and pair? What extravagance!"

"Because the road is very steep and hilly. Well, that is arranged, then. I shall come for you at ten."

"Shall we be away all day?"

"The greater part of it. Why?"

"Because I had better tell Mrs. Pugh to put up something to eat."

"You will do nothing of the kind, please," he said sharply. "I have seen to all that."

"Oh, very well," she answered, smiling and shrugging her shoulders. "Don't snap my head off."

"Well," he said, frowning, "if you asked me to tea, should you like me to suggest bringing cakes and muffins? Where are your manners, Anne?"

"How amusing you are when you are angry!" she answered, taking the hand he held out to her.

"Oh, I dare say," was the brief answer.

Then he bade her good-night, and vanished into the dusk.

CHAPTER XI

THE next day was gloriously bright and fair, and Elfie was a very excited little girl indeed when she heard the day's programme, and could hardly be persuaded to stand still while her clothes were being fastened.

"Isn't it just like my dear Mr. Carroll to think of it?" she exclaimed ecstatically when breakfast was over. "He gets nicer and nicer every day. I only hope," she added seriously, "that we'll find God as nice when we get to heaven."

Anne forbore to criticize, and just then a really smart phaeton dashed up to the door of the cottage, drawn by a pair of spirited-looking chestnuts.

"Oh, what lovely horses!" screamed Elfie, as she rushed out to fling her arms round Carroll. "Where *did* you find them?"

"They grew," said Carroll, as he returned her embrace. "And I only gathered them this morning."

Elfie laughed delightedly, and insisted upon giving each horse a piece of sugar, and asking the wizened-looking driver their names.

"Strawberry and Ginger, miss," he answered. "The near one's Strawberry, and the off one's Ginger."

Strawberry ate his lump of sugar with relish. But Ginger tossed his head contemptuously, and would have none of it. So Elfie gave it also to Strawberry, who appeared very thankful.

"You had better take some kind of wraps," Carroll was saying meanwhile to Anne. "It may be chilly in coming home. I have rugs, of course."

"What a queer-looking little man the driver is!" whispered Elfie to Carroll, as they left the village behind them. "He says his name is Mr. Evan Morgan."

"He is quite right," answered Carroll gravely. "That is his name."

Elfie giggled, and nestled closer against his arm.

"You are quite absurd," she said. "But still, I'm most awfully fond of you. I'd like to marry you when I grow up."

"I feel very much honored," he said, smiling down at Anne, who was looking her very sweetest.

"Did Anne tell you about Dr. Jones?" went on the child suddenly. "Do you know, he actually asked her if she would marry him. Wasn't it calm? Of course, she said she wouldn't."

"Very calm," agreed Carroll, on whose brow rested a heavy frown.

Anne preserved a crimson silence.

"If it had been you it would have been quite different, of course," continued Elfie with relish. "But Dr. Jones — just fancy!"

"You forget, Elfie, how very kind Dr. Jones was to you when you were ill," put in Anne reprovingly.

"Oh yes, I know he was kind to me. But you know, Anne, you couldn't possibly marry anyone with a beard, and a quite turned-up nose, and a face as red as anything."

"People's looks have nothing at all to do with their marriages, Elfie, my child," said Carroll.

"No, I s'pose not," was the thoughtful answer. "Because look at you. Your face is all right, and you've never got married."

"Well, see how many cows you can count in that field," suggested Carroll, with a view of changing the subject.

After a brief silence Elfie announced that there were fourteen. Then she added:

"I wonder what mummy's doing. And when she's going to be home."

"Are you beginning to want to go home?" asked Anne.

"Not a bit. Only — it would be nice if

mummy and daddy suddenly came, wouldn't it?" was the rather wistful answer.

"Dear, faithful wee soul!" murmured Anne, cuddling her up close to her.

"And Mrs. Hargrave," said Carroll. "Miss Stafford would be delighted if she suddenly came, I'm sure."

"Oh no, she wouldn't," returned Elfie quickly. "Because she simply can't bear her. Can you, Anne?"

"I'm afraid she can't bear me either," smiled Anne.

"Detestable person!" observed Carroll. "You remember the lines, Anne?

> "'With talk her task beguiling,
> She blackened people's names,
> Nor dreamed that such reviling
> Annulled her saintly claims.
> And let not truth nor pity
> Impair her little joke,
> Till loves were soiled and lives were spoiled
> By every word she spoke.'

They seem to describe our 'Christian-talking' friend rather accurately."

Here a motor-car whizzed past, and Strawberry and Ginger began to perform some extraordinary evolutions indicative of disapproval. Mr. Evan Morgan swore sturdily under his

breath in the language of his country until they were well in hand again.

The road now began to wind steadily uphill, sometimes leading through shadowy little woods, sometimes across breezy downs, and at last between high sombre cliffs dotted with sparse shrubs and ferns.

They heard the rush of the Falls long before they came in sight. Then, on turning a sharp corner of the road, the foaming little cataracts "burst upon the gaze" (according to local guidebooks), glittering with a dancing brilliance of colors in the strong sunshine.

"How very lovely!" exclaimed Anne. "I certainly shouldn't have liked to miss this. Isn't it curious what a fascination falling or running water has?"

"Yes, it has for most people," said Carroll. "But I once knew a man who couldn't bear to look at running water. He said it gave him the most horrible and inexplicable sensation of fear. And yet he was a remarkably plucky chap in other things, and had been all through the Soudan and Boer Wars."

"How strange!" Anne answered. "And yet I'm not sure that it is strange. I have a horror of a sheet of still water. I shudder if I look at a mill-dam, or any deep, smooth, silent piece of water. I know it is silly, but I can't help it."

Here the carriage stopped, and they all got out, and wandered about, while Mr. Evan Morgan took out the horses and tethered them in such fashion that they could graze comfortably.

Then Carroll announced that, as it was one o'clock, it was time for luncheon. Mr. Evan Morgan had already taken himself and a small luncheon-basket into the shade of a clump of trees. The larger basket held what Elfie described as a perfectly ripping lunch.

"You really are a most wonderful person, dear Mr. Carroll," she said, with an exact reproduction of her mother's voice and manner.

"In this case I quite agree with Elfie," said Anne. "Everything is quite marvellous. This folding-table and these chairs are picnic luxuries that one does not expect in the wilds. These lobster cutlets are beyond all praise; and I simply love ortolans, though I haven't tasted them since I ran away from my aunt. The asparagus is delicious, and the cold lamb all it ought to be. As for the vol-au-vent of oysters, I haven't tasted anything so nice for years. And all the other things are equally delightful."

"Then try this almond-pudding," said Carroll, looking pleased that his efforts as a host were appreciated. "And let me give you a little more champagne."

"No more, thank you. One glass is my limit."

"I like lemonade better than champagne," observed Elfie, sipping contentedly at a small glass of the former beverage. "Can I have cheese straws, Anne? I do love them. They bite one's tongue so."

"Only two, dear. If you want your tongue bitten, here is some preserved ginger. I can assure you, Brian, you are making two pronounced gourmands of Elfie and myself."

"I am glad you are enjoying your lunch," he said, as he refilled his glass. "Personally, I don't think this lunch is a patch on that one you made me share when you found me with influenza — that is as far as my personal appreciation of viands goes."

Here Boxer, having eaten his biscuit, went round to beg for contributions.

"I do hope Boxer is enjoying himself," said Elfie anxiously. "He doesn't look as if he was. He looks as if he wanted something he hasn't got."

"We all cry for the moon," observed Carroll dryly, as he lit a cigarette.

"No, we don't," remonstrated Elfie. "I never cried for the moon. I shouldn't know what to do with it if I had it."

"You are too literal, dear child," murmured Anne, stroking the child's hair affectionately.

"When we cry for the moon, we mean the thing we want most, but can never have."

"Have you cried for it, Anne?"

"I'm afraid so."

"And have you, Mr. Carroll?"

"No doubt," he answered lightly.

While Anne quoted in an absent voice:

> "'Shall we find, above the sphere
> Of our woes,
> All the moons we cried for here?—
> No one knows.'"

"'All the moons'!" repeated Elfie, looking puzzled. "I thought there was only one."

"One man, one moon," said Carroll, knocking the ash from his cigarette.

"You are just laughing at me," complained Elfie in an offended tone.

"Have some more preserved ginger," suggested Carroll. "It's awfully good for little girls."

Elfie took two pieces, and devoured them with relish.

"What do they eat in far countries?" she asked presently.

"Too large an order, little one," Carroll answered lazily. "Different countries have different ways. In some countries they are rather fond of eating people."

"Eating people!" echoed Elfie, horrified. "Oh, Mr. Carroll, have you ever eaten anybody?"

"Not yet," he answered unsmilingly.

"But you wouldn't, would you, even if you were ever so hungry?" she went on, looking at him with very round eyes.

"I might. If that basket had been forgotten to-day, and Miss Stafford and I had been uncontrollably hungry, we might have had to eat you."

"Should you have eaten me raw?" continued Elfie in an awed whisper.

"Oh no; we should have made a fire and roasted you. Then when you were quite ready, we should have squeezed lemon over you, and made a hearty meal."

Elfie's eyes filled with tears.

"Anne wouldn't," she sobbed, as she flung herself on the ground and kicked violently — "even if she was starving of hunger, she wouldn't. Oh, I wouldn't have believed you'd be so cruel. I just hope I'd make you as sick as ever you could be."

"Ah, Brian! it is too bad," exclaimed Anne, half-laughing, half-angry. "Cheer up, Elfie. Mr. Carroll is only teasing you."

Elfie, who had hidden her face in Anne's skirt, slowly uncovered one eye, and cast a doubtful glance at Carroll.

"Well, I wish people would tell me when they're teasing me," she said crossly, "and then I wouldn't have the trouble of crying for nothing."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Carroll, looking down at her with kind, penitent eyes. "It was too bad of me. But you'll forgive me, won't you?"

"All right. Should you like me to kiss you? Anne always kisses me when she forgives me."

"I shall be very pleased if you will kiss me and forgive me, little one," he said, laying down his cigarette.

She jumped into his arms and kissed him heartily.

"There!" she said, rubbing her cheek affectionately against his. "That's all right. Now we're friends again. Anne, you'd better kiss him, too, because you were a little angry with him, you know."

"Mr. Carroll will take my forgiveness for granted, I am sure," Anne replied hastily.

And Carroll was silent.

"Well, but now tell me truly, without teasing me," said Elfie, wetting her finger, and running it along Carroll's thick eyebrows, "what do people eat in that country that the pictures in your hall are about?"

"In Japan?" he asked. "I haven't been there

for a long time; but during six or seven months I spent there, years ago, I don't seem to remember eating anything but raw fish and rice, varied by a kind of seaweed and dried cuttlefish and bamboo shoots, and other queer things."

"It sounds rather nasty," said the child doubtfully. "Are you sure it's quite true?"

"Honest Injun," he answered, laughing.

"I don't think you could have had a very good cook," she said, after a pause for consideration. "Mummy wouldn't have endured it for a moment. And I'm sure Anne wouldn't. Anne can cook, you know."

"Yes, I know she can. She could take a situation as chef any day. I myself would give her a reference. What are you smiling at, Anne?" he added.

"I am thinking of the story of the old Scots lady who had been looking in vain for some time for a good plain cook. And at last a friend cautiously recommended one as a 'very decent woman.' And the old lady exclaimed: 'Damn her decency! Can she cook collops?'"

"Did you know her?" inquired Elfie.

"No, dear — only by repute."

"What are collops, well?"

"I haven't an idea. Ask Mr. Carroll."

"Oh no, Elfie, don't ask me. I am too weak to answer questions. I am a frail creature at

any time; but in Wales I am as a mere nothing."

"You are not a bit weak," said Elfie scornfully. "You are a big strong thing — bigger than daddy."

"Dear child, don't jump up and down on my chest. It cannot be good for me."

"Daddy lets me," she said, pausing in the exercise alluded to.

"Well, my child, I am not your daddy, and I won't let you."

"Have you ever been anybody's daddy?"

Carroll replied in the negative.

"Should you like to be?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. If I were your daddy, I'm afraid I should have to whip you very often."

"Oh, you *wouldn't*. Why, I thought you were fond of me."

"I'm awfully fond of you; but I'm sure you would be improved by an occasional whipping."

"Oh, be quiet. You are only teasing me again. Why can't I call you Brian, as Anne does?"

"Does she call me Brian? I haven't noticed it."

"Yes, she does. Can't I?"

"Certainly, if you like."

"All right, then, I will. Oh, it's beginning to

rain," she added quickly. "Look — quite quick little drops."

"By Jove! so it is," exclaimed Carroll, springing to his feet. "I'm afraid we are going to have a storm, Anne. We had better set out at once."

Mr. Evan Morgan was evidently of the same opinion, for he had already begun to untether the chestnuts, and in a few minutes had backed them into the shafts of the phaeton.

Carroll wrapped Anne and Elfie in cloaks and rugs, and in an incredibly short time they had gathered up all their belongings, and started on their homeward way.

At first the rain was only a persistent drizzle; then it increased to a steady downpour. The sky grew black and threatening, and thunder muttered in the distance. Anne looked uncomfortable, for she did not like thunder. It was one of the few things that got on her nerves.

"It's dreadfully dark," said Elfie, under her breath. "Anne dear, I'm frightened."

Boxer was plainly frightened, too; for he whined dismally, and crept under Anne's skirt.

When they had gone about a couple of miles, a vivid flash of lightning made Elfie scream and cover her eyes with her hands, while a terrific crash of thunder roared almost immediately overhead. This was enough for the chestnuts, who

stopped short for a couple of seconds, then set off at a tearing gallop.

When a few minutes had passed, it became evident that Mr. Evan Morgan had lost all control over the terrified brutes, and just as this had dawned upon Anne, he turned an ashy face to Carroll, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"I can't hold them, sir."

"You'd better let me take the reins, then," replied Carroll. "It's all right, Elfie. Don't be frightened. Look at Anne, how brave and calm she is."

As he spoke he swung himself over to the box-seat, and took the reins from Morgan's shaking fingers. He, too, was rather pale, for he and Morgan knew, though Anne did not, that they were within half a mile of a long and dangerously steep hill. The road, to be sure, was downhill all the way; but the particular hill of which I write requires special care in driving even one horse, much more two.

They were now going at a terrific speed, and Carroll doubted whether he could get control of the horses before they came to the hill.

Anne, though shaking with fear, gazed in a fascinated way at Carroll's powerful, well-knit figure, as he held the reins in a firm, masterful grasp, and drew steadily and slowly back without jerking or pulling. And she knew that the same

dread haunted his mind as hers — the dread lest the reins should break.

On they flew, hedges, trees, and boulders all flashing past in a dim, confused blur. Elfie was screaming at the top of her voice, and Anne tried in vain to quiet her. The thunder rattled above them, the lightning became more vivid and more frequent. In all her life Anne never forgot that wild drive — the trampling sound of the horses' feet, Elfie's cries, the swaying motion of the carriage, and Carroll's grim, stern profile.

Presently Carroll braced himself more firmly against the footboard, and cautiously took a shorter grip of the reins. As he did so he leaned slightly forward, and spoke to the excited animals in the soothing and yet masterful tone that all horses know and respect. But they were too nervous and terrified still to respond. Nevertheless, they knew that the hands upon the reins were practised and relentless hands, and that submission was only a matter of time.

And now they were on the brow of the dreaded hill. Carroll set his teeth. He could only do his best to guide the plunging creatures past the dangerous corners. Mercifully, the storm began to abate, or that mad rush down the hill could only have had one end. But at last, as though by a miracle, they reached the bottom, and crossed a

bridge, and so came on to a piece of gradually ascending ground.

"Thank God!" muttered Carroll, as for the first time the hitherto obstinate mouths answered to his hands.

In a few minutes the animals were completely under his control, though still nervous and inclined to prance. And presently, being rather exhausted by their mad race, they settled down into a smart trot.

Whereupon Carroll relinquished the reins to Mr. Evan Morgan, and climbed back to his seat.

Then he took Elfie on his knee, and half coaxed, half scolded her into silence.

"Why, I thought you were such a plucky little woman," he said reproachfully. "I should never have believed you would cry and scream like that. No wonder the poor horses were frightened."

"I don't care," she said, with the remains of a sob. "I was just frightened to death, and I *had* to scream. If you hadn't been here we would have been killed."

"But I was here, little goose. Suppose I had sobbed and screamed? And then Anne?"

Whereupon Elfie laughed and cried together.

"You look very pale, Anne," Carroll said presently, when Elfie had burrowed under his jacket, and composed herself to sleep.

"I feel very pale," she answered briefly; then she added: "There was danger, wasn't there?"

He nodded.

"Thank God you were here," she said under her breath.

"My dear Anne, I am responsible for us all being here. We should rather thank God that the reins were so tough."

"Ah yes, I thought of that," she said, with a shudder. "If they had broken! It doesn't bear thinking of."

"Then don't think of it," he answered hastily. "It's all over. Let us forget it."

"You are awfully brave," she said, a faint color creeping into her cheeks.

He smiled.

"My dear Anne, you exaggerate," he said lightly. "Mine was a very negative kind of bravery. I'm accustomed to horses and their tantrums. Besides, I have fairly strong wrists and arms. You were really brave, for though you knew you were scared to death, you didn't utter a sound."

"You couldn't have heard me if I had," she answered. "Elfie made sounds enough for three."

"Couldn't help it," said a muffled voice from under the shelter of Carroll's coat.

"Come out, you small ostrich," said Carroll,

giving the speaker a little shake. "It has stopped raining, and the sun is just going to shine."

"I was asleep," observed Elfie, rubbing her eyes, "and I dreamed that we were all riding on horses that had wings; and we flew and flew till we came to a desert island, and savages ate us all up. And then we had to go to heaven; and Anne was a lovely angel, with silver clothes, and she said: 'Elfie made sounds enough for three.' And then I woke up."

"And was I not an angel?" asked Carroll.

Elfie shook her head.

"No; you had on a jacket and a straw hat, just the same as you have now."

"It doesn't sound like celestial attire," admitted Carroll.

"Perhaps, if I hadn't waked up so suddenly, I might have dreamed that you got to be an angel at last," said the child consolingly.

CHAPTER XII

AFTER the memorable day of the drive, the rest of the time at Blasyllan seemed to Anne to rush past at railway speed. Elfie grew stronger and pinker day by day, and certainly had plenty of fresh air, for she and Anne were once more seldom in the house except for meals and at night.

And I am bound to say that Carroll managed to spend a good deal of his time with them.

Neither he nor Anne added much to their literary reputation at this time. But then they were on a holiday, so perhaps their idleness may be excused.

And so the days ran on until the last evening had come. Elfie was in bed, and Anne had finished all the packing, except a few odds and ends which could be seen to in the morning. Carroll, who usually made his appearance at the cottage either in the afternoon or evening, had just come up the garden-walk to the sitting-room window, where Anne sat in the twilight.

"Are you too tired to come for a last walk along the sands?" he asked.

"No; I should like it. Wait till I get my hat."

"Put on some kind of wrap," he said. "There's rather a sharp wind blowing up. I'm afraid we shall have rain to-morrow."

"I shall be quite sorry to leave this dear little place," Anne said, as they walked slowly along the beach in the opposite direction from the village. "I don't think I ever enjoyed a holiday so much before."

She quite forgot, you see, how very homesick she had been on the night of Carroll's arrival. And perhaps Carroll forgot too. In any case, he did not remind her of it. That was one of what Anne called his "nicenesses." He never reminded one of awkward sayings or actions one had either forgotten or wanted to forget. He never said, "I told you so," nor "What did you expect?" nor any of the other irritating platitudes of the painfully frank and candid friend. Anne, indeed, had already come to think of him as quite one of the nicest personalities she had ever met.

"I think I may say I have thoroughly enjoyed my holiday too," he said. "It's been awfully nice, Anne, being able to see you every day. And even when we get back to town, we shall still, figuratively speaking, be under one roof."

"Yes," answered Anne, with a little murmur-

ing. "To quote dear Mrs. Hargrave, we 'live on one another's doorsteps.'"

"You will let me come in to see you now and then?" he said, after a pause.

"Of course, if you want to come."

"The question is, shall you want to see me?"

"When doubts begin to assail you on the subject, your visits can cease," she said conclusively, "and we can bury our friendship, and write over its tomb: 'This episode is closed.'"

"Do you know, Anne, I can imagine your being rather terrifying if you were seriously offended."

"Great care must be taken not to offend me then. Curiously enough, I have sometimes thought the same of you."

"I have rather a nasty temper," he acknowledged, "but I should hardly be likely to show it to you."

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps you will when you know me better. Friendship is not always polite, you know."

"It ought to be. I have an idea that the more intimate one is with anyone, the less right one has to take liberties, or eliminate courtesies."

"I dare say you are right. You would make an ideal brother. But it is curious how some natures delight in being rude and downright cruel to those who can't, or won't, resent it. Look

at some husbands and wives. As a matter of fact, I suppose the old saying is true that if you want really to know people you must live with them."

"The marriage laws don't take that into account," he answered dryly.

"No. That is why I sometimes wonder if there isn't something in the idea of trial-marriages. I mean marriages for a year, or five years, or ten years, as the case might be. It would at least give people a chance of finding out if they were fond enough of one another to be tied together for life."

"Don't talk like that," he said sharply. "It is horrible. Personally, I should object to marrying a woman who had belonged to another man, and been returned as unsatisfactory."

"But it might be the man who was returned as unsatisfactory," she said calmly.

"Oh, nonsense! No nice woman would enter into an agreement of that kind."

"Perhaps I am not a nice woman."

He looked at his watch.

"Perhaps we had better turn back now," he said rather formally.

Anne's eyes danced.

"'I have rather a nasty temper,'" she quoted, in a demure voice. "'But I should hardly be likely to show it to you.'"

He smiled unwillingly.

"You are a provoking little creature," he said. "But, seriously, I hate to hear you advocate theories of that kind. It seems so unlike you."

"Does it? Now I really wonder what kind of Anne Stafford is photographed on your brain?"

"I don't think you would object to the photograph, if you could see it," he answered quietly.

"I have no doubt it is considerably touched-up," she said. "It is curious how men idealize their own women friends, and very often systematically run down women as a class."

"No, Anne," he said, answering the first part of her speech and ignoring the last, "your portrait is not in the least touched-up. All your funny little faults are there, as well as all your good points. Perhaps the latter may be a little accentuated — but only a little."

"Ought friendship to see faults?" she answered. "I thought it ignored all but virtues."

"I couldn't have a plaster-of-Paris saint for a friend," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "It is fatiguing to stand always on tiptoe."

"And what are my faults, then?" asked Anne, only half-pleased.

"Ah, your *amour propre* is on the defensive, you strange little bundle of contradictions! Why,

Anne, did you think I looked upon you as perfect?"

"Well," she answered slowly, "I — I don't see why you shouldn't, to a certain extent."

"Anne, what a child you are! Do you know it? And yet, at times, what a very dignified little person you can be!" Then, as she did not answer, he went on: "And what about me, then? Am I quite perfect in your eyes? I am very sure I am not."

"If I thought you perfect, you could hardly expect me to tell you so," she said, laughing.

"I don't see why you should hesitate to say nice things to me. It is a privilege I don't enjoy from anybody else."

"Now — I should have thought you were the kind of man who would be superbly indifferent to what anyone either said or thought of you."

"To what most people say and think of me I am superbly indifferent. But I confess that in your estimation I am rather anxious to stand high."

"Well, so you do!" she answered frankly. "I like you very much, and I think you extremely nice."

"And my faults?" he persisted.

"Your faults? When I find them I shall tell you. You have only shown your best side to me

as yet. Ah! there is a spot of rain. We must hurry back."

. . . . . .

The journey to town next day was uneventful. Carroll managed to secure a carriage to themselves, and Elfie danced backwards and forwards from one window to another until she was tired, and fell asleep within Carroll's arm. Boxer sat contentedly looking out of the window during the whole journey. He was an observant dog, and very fond of travelling.

It was evening when they arrived at Paddington, and Elfie was rather sleepy and cross. Anne felt very tired, and without quite knowing why, very depressed as well.

As the train ran alongside the platform, Anne saw a pair of familiar green eyes gazing at her in amazed disapproval. And a few minutes later, as she and Elfie stood beside Carroll, while a porter called a cab, she saw the same pair of green eyes lit up with a still fiercer disapproval.

Elfie saw them too, and said, in her clear young voice:

"Look, Anne — there's that horrid Mrs. Hargrave! *Isn't* she glaring at us! I'm going to pretend I don't see her."

As Carroll helped Anne into the cab, he said, in a low voice:

"I shall follow in a hansom. We need not

further 'irritate the animals' by driving off together."

"What animals?" asked Elfie, who had sharp ears.

"Vultures," answered Carroll gravely.

"But a vulture isn't an animal, it's a bird," said the child. "I've seen a picture of one."

"Yes; but it's a bird of prey," he answered, with a cryptic smile.

Then he stepped back, and the cab drove off.

"Did he mean Mrs. Hargrave?" inquired Elfie, after a moment or two's thought.

And Anne answered:

"I think he must have done."

Anne thought her flat seemed rather desolate as she sat down to her solitary supper. To be sure, it was entirely her own fault that it was solitary, for Mr. and Mrs. Charteris had almost insisted that she should stay and have dinner with them. And Elfie, needless to say, had clamorously seconded the invitation, as she was to be allowed, for this night only, to dine with her parents.

But Anne was tired, and looking forward to going to bed early. Therefore, as I have said, her meal was solitary, and none too cheerful.

She did not go to bed so very early after all, for her unpacking took longer than she thought it would. And as she was taking in her doormat

for the night, Carroll and Boxer came out *en route* for their usual evening stroll.

"So you got home all right?" said Carroll. "You'll miss the child to-night, won't you? She's a jolly little soul, and very good company."

"Yes, I shall miss her," Anne answered. "However, she isn't very far away."

Here Boxer barked rudely, as a hint that he had been waiting long enough.

"Well, good-night," said Carroll. "Sleep well. If you won't be too busy to-morrow evening, may I come in and have a talk?"

"Yes, do," she answered. "I have actually been feeling quite lonely. Good-night."

But the few kindly words cheered her; and as she lay in bed that night, and looked dreamily across the sea of house-tops before she slept, she added a brief footnote to her prayers, desiring a blessing on Brian Carroll.

The following day was spent in putting her flat in order. Elfie danced in during the morning, full of the news that her new governess was coming in a fortnight, and that she was French, and that her name was Mademoiselle de Cornay.

And in the evening Carroll came, as he had said he would. Anne had put on one of her prettiest frocks. She knew it was extravagant, but she told herself she did not care. In any case, her visitor certainly appreciated it, and showed that

he did. He brought her some books — and a letter. The letter was from the editor of a well-known magazine, accepting Anne's story, which Carroll had sent him just after she went to Wales.

"Oh, how glad I am! How good of you!" she exclaimed, as she handed him the letter again. "Ten guineas! I can hardly believe it."

"No; keep the letter," he said. "You are the person concerned. I am rather pleased, you know," he added, as he struck a match, "because, if Denton accepts a thing, it shows it is really good stuff. And he will go on accepting it. If I were you, I should set to work on a series of stories on the same lines as the one he has taken. He will take them all, I'll guarantee."

Anne looked at him with grateful eyes.

"As if I didn't know," she said, in a low voice, "that you had written to him when you sent the story — and that if you hadn't, he never would have looked at it."

"My dear Anne, if it hadn't been good work, fifty letters wouldn't have made Denton look at it; so don't run away with any absurd idea of that kind."

"But you did write to him," she persisted.

"Well, naturally," he admitted. "Does one ever send a manuscript without writing?"

"You can't deceive me," she said inexorably.

"But you are a dear, kind boy, and I shall always be grateful to you."

"There need be no such word as gratitude between you and me," he said, in a low voice.

Both were silent for a time. Anne was sitting on a low chair close to the stove, for though the calendar said it was May, it was cold and almost wintry, and one side of her usually cream-pale face was flushed to a deep soft pink.

Presently she turned her head, and said uneasily:

"Why do you look at me so?"

He did not answer immediately; then he said, still looking at her:

"I am trying to decide whether I prefer a pale Anne or a rosy Anne."

"And which do you?"

"I don't know. Either — I think. Or both."

Just then Boxer growled and barked, and the door-bell rang.

"Shall I go to the door?" asked Carroll, rising.

"No, thank you; I will go. I don't know who it can be. It is too late for Elfie."

But when she opened the door, her heart gave a jump of dismay as she came face to face with Mrs. Hargrave.

"Can I have a few minutes' conversation with you, Miss Stafford?" said the visitor, in a voice

that made Anne long to shake her. "I suppose — I hardly know — am I right in calling you Miss Stafford?"

"What do you mean?" asked Anne haughtily. "You know I am Miss Stafford."

Mrs. Hargrave coughed.

"I didn't know," she said primly. "I thought — I *hoped* — you might be married."

"Married?" echoed Anne in amazement. "Certainly I am not married. Why should you think so?"

"Well, I am sorry to hear it," was the enigmatical answer. "If you will allow me, I will come inside for a minute. It is rather draughty standing here." Then, as she went past Anne into the sitting-room, she said with a melodramatic start: "Oh, you are not alone. I fear I have disturbed you."

"Not at all," Anne replied shortly. "May I introduce Mr. Carroll — Mrs. Hargrave?"

Carroll bowed gravely, but Mrs. Hargrave gazed at him as though he had been a scorpion; then turned her back upon him and ostentatiously affected to examine a picture over the mantelpiece. Boxer kept up a low and continuous growling.

A cynical smile curved Carroll's lips.

"It is late — I must be going," he said, as he took Anne's hand. "Good-night. Let me know

if there is anything I can do for you. Come, Boxer."

As they went out into the hall, Anne said under her breath:

"Oh, Brian, I am so annoyed that you should have been treated so rudely. She is such an old cat."

"Now, don't worry yourself, child," he answered, lowering his voice also, and laying his hands on her shoulders. "And, above all, don't let her make you angry. The situation isn't worth it. Cheer up. I shall see you some time to-morrow."

Anne went back to her sitting-room with a very forbidding expression in her pretty eyes.

"Have you anything very important to say to me, Mrs. Hargrave?" she asked coldly.

Mrs. Hargrave had seated herself in a very upright position on the sofa, and looked fully equipped for battle.

"Miss Stafford," she said, with her usual preliminary cough, "I feel it is only my duty as a Christian and a Church member to ask you to pause in your downhill path, and listen to me."

Anne strangled an angry laugh and a yawn at the same time.

"When I saw you and that — that man alight from the same railway-carriage yesterday evening I hoped — nay, I prayed — though I knew

it was unlikely," continued Mrs. Hargrave, "that you might be married — that is to say, I hoped so for the sake of your reputation only. Otherwise, I could hardly imagine a more terrible fate for a young girl than to become the wife of the — the person who has just left the room."

Anne's eyes flashed, but she did not speak.

"How you can reconcile it with the most primitive ideas of propriety," her visitor continued, warming to her subject, "to actually go away with a man for three weeks to a lonely Welsh village, I hardly dare to pollute my mind by thinking. As for that innocent though very impertinent child being allowed to be with you — well, I can only say that it is just like Frances Charteris."

Anne wound up the clock, compared it with her watch, and snapped it shut again — all in silence.

Mrs. Hargrave looked at her with a curiously vindictive light in her pale eyes; then she went on slowly:

"Your treating me with studied rudeness will not soften the awful piece of news I have for you. I conclude you have allowed yourself to care for this man. Well, while you have been away, I have taken the trouble — solely on your account — to make careful inquiries about him. There is very good reason for his being under a

cloud — for living the life of a disgraced hermit, as he does. He is " — here the speaker lowered her voice to a hissing whisper — " a common forger. He forged his father's name for ten thousand pounds."

Anne felt the color leave her cheeks, but the next moment she laughed aloud.

" Whoever told you that told you a shameful lie," she answered, controlling her voice with difficulty.

" You don't believe it, then? " said the elder woman, with an ugly smile. " And yet you have gone as white as a sheet. Can I get you a glass of water? "

" I certainly do not believe it," Anne said, with a scornful movement of her head. " Such a crime would be absolutely impossible to him."

" Would it? Ask him, then, and see what he says — or, rather, see what his face says. Well, good-night; I have come on a thankless errand, it appears. However, I expected no thanks. I was only anxious to do my duty as a Christian."

" Good-night," said Anne, with a stony smile.

She was still smiling as the door closed sharply; then she sat down and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XIII

ANNE did not sleep that night. She did not believe Mrs. Hargrave's horrible calumny, of course. So she told herself. And yet — and yet — it haunted her. She got up early, and, tired and heavy-eyed, struggled through her morning duties.

"I am a man under a cloud," she seemed to hear him say. And again; "You doubtless have friends; I have none."

Was this what he had meant? Could it be?

She shook it out of her mind, and refused to think of it. But it came back more and more insistently.

In the early afternoon she saw a motor-car stop under her window. To her surprise, her sister got out, and a minute or two later the door-bell whirred sharply.

Myra Pontifex came in like a languid whirlwind, if such a paradox is permissible, threw off her heavy furs, and sank down on the sofa.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Anne, when the ordinary greetings had been exchanged. "You look rather upset."

"I am upset," her sister answered in a tone of acute annoyance. "Really, Anne, as Everard said at luncheon, I don't know what is to be done with you."

"I am very much obliged to Everard," returned Anne calmly. "Please tell him that whatever has to be done with me, he will not be called upon to do it."

"Now, now, my dear, don't be flippant. That can do no good. As a matter of fact, I had a visit this morning from a Mrs. Hargrave. It appears that she was a friend of our grandmother's sister. What did you say? Oh, I thought you spoke. She tells me that you are getting yourself talked about in the most appalling way. Really, it has given me the most frightful nervous headache."

As she spoke she took a gold-mounted bottle of smelling-salts from her muff, and sniffed at it violently.

"When you feel a little better," observed Anne, after a pause, "perhaps you will tell me what our grandmother's sister's friend has been saying about me."

"She says that you have been staying for weeks with Sir John Carroll's eldest son at some out-of-the-way place in Wales — that he almost lives here, and —— Oh, I can't tell you all the dreadful things she said."

"I can imagine them," replied Anne dryly.

"How on earth did you get to know Brian Carroll?" went on Mrs. Pontifex, in an exasperated voice.

"A friend introduced us," said Anne, with a grim smile as she thought of Boxer. "I did not know that he was a son of Sir John Carroll's, however."

"A friend? I shouldn't have thought he had any. Is it possible, Anne, that you haven't heard about him? He is ostracized by all his people, and by everybody who is anybody."

"Is he? Why?"

Anne's voice shook in spite of herself.

"Why? Because he forged his father's name for ten thousand pounds. Sir John didn't prosecute, because of the scandal, and besides, he was awfully fond of this son. So the thing was hushed up. But, of course, socially he is as good as dead."

"Well — and what is all this to me?" said Anne in a hard voice.

"Oh, Anne, you were always so impossible. Surely it must be something to you, if it is true, as this Mrs. Hargrave says, that if you are not married to him, you ought to be."

Anne laughed suddenly.

"How can you laugh!" exclaimed her sister. "Oh dear — I don't know what Everard will

say. And you have not even told me if what this woman says is true. She seems a very well-meaning person. She said she felt it was only her duty as a Christian to tell me how my sister's name was becoming a byword, and that she felt she ought——"

"To tell as many lies as she could manage in the time she had at her disposal," put in Anne unemotionally.

"But were they lies?" asked Mrs. Pontifex anxiously. "Did you not go to that place in Wales with him?"

"I did not go with him. But he was there while I was there," replied Anne, scorning to make any explanations.

"Merciful heavens! And does he live here?" almost screamed her sister.

"He lives in the flat opposite," admitted Anne.

"And," the other went on almost hysterically, "are you actually going to marry him? But, of course, you will have to. Oh, dear me, what on earth will Everard say when I tell him that his sister-in-law is going to marry a forger?"

"You need not tell him," was the calm answer. "I have no intention of marrying Mr. Carroll."

"But, Anne, do you mean to tell me seriously that he has said nothing of marriage — nothing at all?"

"Nothing at all."

"And that you are content that matters should go on as they are?"

This in a deeply shocked tone.

"Quite content, thank you."

Mrs. Pontifex rose, and put on her fur mantle and boa.

"That is enough, Anne," she said, very coldly. "I shall ask you no more questions."

"I am so glad," returned Anne. "Good-by. I suppose you have washed your hands of me now?"

"I am afraid you have put it only too correctly," was the arctic answer. "Everard and I could not afford to know Brian Carroll's wife, much less anyone who ——"

The look in Anne's eyes silenced her, and she went out, closing the door of the flat noisily behind her.

Later in the afternoon Frances Charteris came.

"My poor, dear Anne," she said, somewhat nervously, "I have come to have a good long talk with you. Elfie teased to come, but I wouldn't let her. I hardly know how to tell you, but I have heard the most terrible news about the Unknown — I mean your friend Mr. Carroll. What *do* you think? The real truth about him is that he forged his father's name. Oh, it is quite true, my poor dear. Mrs. Har-

grave, old cat, told me some time ago. But, of course, I didn't believe her; and so I have asked people who know the Carrolls. And Alfred has heard of it too. Isn't it awful! And fancy his being down at Blasyllan while you and Elfie were both there. It is really too shocking. Of course, you must cut him dead after this. I myself have almost bowed to him once or twice on the stairs. Really, that is the worst of flats — one never knows who one's neighbors are. But, after all, you can easily drop him, poor man! One really can't help being sorry for him — his head is so beautifully set on his shoulders. And perhaps he did it in a fit of temporary insanity. I often hope my poor Alfred won't do anything in a fit of temporary insanity, I'm sure. He had an aunt who always put the silver forks in her pocket when she went out to dinner. Her maid used to have to return them next day. They said it was kleptomania, and no notice was taken. So perhaps this poor man has some other kind of mania that makes him write other people's names instead of his own. Personally, I shouldn't mind bowing to him, he is so good-looking. But Alfred is so particular. Now I must go, dear. Come in some evening and dine with us. You must be lonely, mewed up here all alone."

Anne sat quite still for a long time after her

friend had gone. She felt crushed and bewildered. And a little serpent of doubt whispered to her heart: "What if it should be true?" It seemed as though all her world had tumbled about her ears. She was not a crying woman, but in the despairing misery that clutched her she fell into a fit of helpless convulsive sobbing, that gave her no relief and seemed to sap her strength away.

The day waned, and the room grew darker. The sky had become overcast, and heavy rain dashed against the window. Anne rose and went to her room to bathe her eyes. As she crossed the little hall, someone tapped gently at the postbox. She thought it was Elfie, for the child sometimes announced her presence in that way; and she hesitated about submitting her tear-stained face and red and swollen eyelids to the scrutiny of these sharp young eyes.

But the summons came again, more imperatively this time; and she opened the door to find that not Elfie, but Carroll, stood on the mat.

She admitted him in silence, her heart beating as if it would choke her.

"Good God! What is the matter?" he exclaimed, as he saw her face. "Have you heard any bad news?"

She nodded dumbly.

"Shall I go away, and come in later?" he asked, his voice very gentle, and almost tender.

But she shook her head, and, still without speaking, held out her hand to him. A passion of impotent rage against his traducers took hold of her. And her heart once and for all acquitted him of all evil.

"Would it help you to tell me about it?" he went on, seating himself beside her on the sofa.

"I can't," she sobbed. "I can't!"

"Is it something very bad, my poor little Anne?"

"Oh yes; it breaks my heart."

And then, neither of them quite knew how it happened, but his arms were round her, and her head was pressed down on his breast.

"Anne dearest," he said agitatedly, "let me comfort you; for I love you — don't you know it? And yet, God help me, I have no right to tell you so."

"Oh, do you, Brian — *do* you?" she murmured, clinging to him closely. "Are you quite sure?"

"I am only too sure, Anne."

"I am glad — glad," she said, her voice muffled by its contact with the sleeve of his coat, "because I — I love you, too. And if we love each other, nothing matters — nothing."

He kissed her lips passionately, but only once, and his eyes were dark and troubled.

"I have no right to your love and kisses, my little Anne," he said in a queer, stifled voice, "for I cannot ask you to marry me. I cannot offer you a name that has been dragged in the mud, as mine has been."

"I don't care whether we are ever married or not," was the reckless answer, "so long as I know that you love me. But, Brian, this crime that you are accused of —— Ah yes, I have heard. I know what they say you have done. But you are not guilty of it, I know. Say so, my dearest."

His face whitened.

"I cannot say so."

"You mean — you will not," she said breathlessly.

"I mean — I cannot."

She crept closer to him.

"Brian, even if you were guilty of this thing — I know you are not, but even if you were I should love you just the same. Do you hear? Do you understand? I should love you just the same — just the same."

"Anne — Anne — am I dreaming?"

"No, I don't think so. And yet I don't know. Perhaps we are both dreaming. Brian, when did you first begin to love me?"

"The first day I saw you, I think. And you, Anne?"

"Oh, I don't know. I forget."

"Oh, my dearest," he said in a deep, shaken voice, "how happy we might have been if — if things had only been different!"

"I can't see it," she answered obstinately. "I don't care what they accuse you of. I know you are innocent."

"Am I, Anne? I have not said so."

"But I believe in you — in the Brian you are to me. I will not let you give me up."

"Dear, I cannot give up what I have never had."

"You won't have my love, then? You won't let me be your — wife? It would make me so happy, Brian."

"Oh, child, don't tempt me. If you knew how the temptation grips me and holds me — to take you, in spite of everything."

"I am no child," she interrupted him wildly. "I know what I am saying. I know what I want. Though you were accused of murder, I should love you all the same."

"Anne — Anne — there is no hope for us. Don't torture me by giving me glimpses of an impossible Paradise. It was cowardly of me to tell you I — cared."

She sat up and looked straight into his eyes.

"Brian, can you tell me that you — *you*, my proud, noble boy — are guilty of the base, mean crime of forgery? Ah — I know. You are shielding someone else. You need not deny it. That is the explanation. I wonder I did not think of it before."

He rose and put her gently away from him.

"My loyal little Anne, you must not say such things. It would have been better for you if you had never seen me. Perhaps, even now, it would be better if we never saw one another again."

She looked up at him, all unnerved and trembling, like a frightened child.

"Ah no, no; don't say that," she whispered. "Don't even hint at such a thing. I couldn't bear it."

"Oh, I am a fool," he said savagely. "As if I could bear it either. Fate has been damnably cruel to us."

"Yes," she answered in a tired voice; "but at least it has given me your love, and you mine."

"I can't believe it possible that you do love me," he said drearily.

"Brian, how can you doubt that I love you? Haven't I let you — kiss my lips?"

And she blushed — blushed so adorably that Carroll drew her closer to him, and gently kissed her again.

"Won't you tell me everything?" she pleaded.

after a long silence. "Surely you could trust me?"

"Yes, my dearest, I can trust you, and you must trust me; but I cannot tell you everything."

"Some day, can you?"

"No, Anne — never."

"Very well, dear." And she smiled bravely through her tears. "It will make no difference. We will love each other, and trust each other; and though we can't be married — for I can't make you marry me against your will — we will belong to each other till the end of the world."

He did not answer, but sat down at the table, and buried his face in his outstretched arms. When he raised it again, he looked haggard and almost old.

"You must let me go now," he said indistinctly.

She clasped her hands round his arm.

"But you will come back again?" she said, almost voicelessly. "You will not give me up? Brian, it will kill me if you do."

"It is you who ought to give me up," he answered, with a wintry smile. "Oh, my dear, do you care so much?"

"Yes, I care so much. I shall always care. Even if you said, 'Anne, I was mistaken; I do not love you — I do not want your love,' I should go on caring all the same."

He took her in his arms and laid his head down on her shoulder for a second or two; then he went quickly out of the room.

On the following day Carroll overtook Elfie toiling upstairs under the weight of a large bundle of flowers and a bag of oranges.

"Good-morning, Elfie," he said. "Let me take these for you."

"No, thank you," the little one answered gravely. "Mummy's just coming." Then she added with trembling lips: "Daddy says I mustn't speak to you any more, and mummy says it is because you have done something very wicked. Oh, Mr. Carroll, why did you?"

And her clear young eyes filled with tears.

Carroll's face darkened, but his voice was very gentle as he said:

"If your father says you are not to speak to me, you must not, Elfie; so we had better say good-by."

"For always?" she asked mournfully.

"Yes, I think so."

Elfie dropped her parcels and began to cry. The oranges came out of the bag, and rolled downstairs in golden opulence, until Frances Charteris, who was coming up, stopped them.

Carroll, followed by Boxer, went on his way upstairs.

"Time I was moving on, I fancy," he thought

bitterly, as he let himself into his flat and closed the door. "Colecourt Mansions is getting too hot to hold me. Well, I have only myself to blame."

He found a little note in his post-box. It was from Anne, and ran thus:

"My own Dear,

"I have been thinking of you all night, and I am absolutely certain that, as I said yesterday, you are shielding someone else. It is just the noble, brave, quixotic, and yet really foolish thing you would do. However, if you think it right, I shall not speak of it again. But, Brian, remember that we have confessed that we love each other, and *nothing can alter that.* And, whether we are ever married or not, I consider myself engaged to you. Nothing that you can say or do will make me consider myself not engaged. If you love me, it must be a comfort to you to be engaged to someone who loves you with all her heart, whatever you have done, or are supposed to have done. I shall expect you some time this afternoon.

"Yours forever,

"Anne."

Carroll's eyes were rather dim as he kissed the little note, and put it carefully away in an inside

pocket. Scarcely had he done so when the door-bell rang, and Barney Musgrave sauntered in.

"Hullo, old boy," he said in his cheery yet languid voice, "you're looking a bit off-color. Anything wrong?"

"No, nothing special."

"A woman, by any chance?" hazarded the other.

"Barney, don't be an ass. Sit down, and help yourself to cigarettes, and anything else you fancy, but don't talk rot."

"It is a woman, then," murmured Barney under his breath. "Good old Brian!"

"Saw your people yesterday," he said aloud, when he had surrounded himself with smoke.

"Did you? They inquired affectionately for me, of course?"

"No; your name wasn't mentioned — except by me."

"Ah."

"I saw your estimable brother Felix, too, at one of the clubs. I flatter myself I made him feel somewhat humpy."

"Yes? How did you manage that?"

"Oh, I have various ways of cutting young cubs on the raw," said Barney casually; then he added: "Come up the river with me to-morrow, Brian. The wind's gone out of the east, and it's going to be warm."

"Can't; I've a lot of writing to do."

"Oh, rubbish! Chuck it! Hang it all, old chap, you can't want to write for money. Do you suppose I don't know about your Aunt Deborah's legacy of a cool thousand a year?"

"I can't come, thanks," was the unemotional answer.

"Then, as I said, you're fooling after some woman. Well, I'm off in the meantime. So long."

CHAPTER XIV

CARROLL did not tell Anne of his meeting with little Elfie on the stairs. It had been rather a stab to him, for he was fond of the child, and he knew it would grieve Anne too. As a matter of fact, if Anne had known, she would in all probability have quarrelled with the Charterises outright; but, as she did not know, she accepted an invitation to dine with them on the following evening, and go to the play with them afterwards.

Anne found Frances looking worried and almost cross.

"What is it?" asked the former, as she held out first one foot and then the other to the fire; for the wind had veered round to the east again, and it was bitterly cold.

"What is it?" repeated Frances, throwing out her hands helplessly. "My dear Anne, I hope you are prepared to be frozen, inside and out. Alfred has suddenly announced that, whatever the weather, we are to have nothing but cold viands for the future. Cold soup, cold fish,

cold entrées, cold joints and sweets, and always, even in December, iced coffee. He says hot food is fatal to even the finest digestion. It really is trying. Fancy cold soup and vegetables! Whatever you do, Anne, never marry a man with fads. Do you remember my telling you that once he would have nothing eaten in the household but nuts? And it made me so ill! And another time he would have nothing cooked, and we had to devour sanguinary fish, flesh, and fowl. And I thought I should have died after raw cauliflower. I know you'll have pains all night, dear. I shall, I know. But Alfred will only say, 'Try to sleep, darling.'"

Anne stifled her amusement, and tried to console her friend by pointing out that compulsory cold food was better than food that was compulsorily too hot.

"Your husband might have insisted on our bolting scalding soup and coffee, and everything else to follow suit," she said. "That would have been a thousand times worse, to my mind."

"Oh, I don't know," answered Frances lugubriously. "Hot things cool if you give them time. But cold things don't get hot if you wait forever."

Here the door opened to admit Alfred Charteris's brother Eric. He was a delightfully breezy and inconsequent young man, a marked

contrast to his brother in every way. He was about twenty-three, and had just left Oxford, after a moderately successful, but wholly enjoyable career there. Anne liked him at once, and they immediately embarked in friendly conversation. He alluded casually to his brother as "a good old fungus, but not quite normal," and spoke of his sister-in-law in terms of genuine affection.

Alfred Charteris came in just before the dinner-gong sounded, and complained loudly of the heat of the room. He insisted upon all the windows being opened top and bottom in drawing-room and dining-room.

"Frightfully close in these flats," he said, as they sat down to dinner. "Don't you think so, Miss Stafford?"

"No, I can't say I have noticed it," replied Anne, as she took a spoonful of ice-cold soup. "And to-night I think it is too cold to be close anywhere."

"Cold!" he repeated, fanning himself with his table-napkin. "Do you really find it so? Frances — you are not cold, are you?"

"Why, Alfred, I am simply wretched with cold, and you know it," whimpered Frances. "My teeth are absolutely chattering, and my nose is quite blue."

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Char-

teris. "Jackson, close the windows at the bottom. Is that better, Frances, my love?"

"Take some soup, Fan," grinned Eric. "That will warm you. At least, that is what soup is popularly supposed to do in cold weather."

"Cold and heat are largely matters of imagination," observed Alfred, with an indulgent smile. "It is best to resist these impulses to feel inconvenienced by the conception of either."

"Oh, Alfred, you are surely not going to enthuse about Christian Science next," said his wife piteously. "Really, that will be the climax. Jackson, bring me a cup of very hot tea and some buttered toast, please. No, Alfred, you need not look at me in that way. I cannot eat cold things when I'm cold, nor hot things when I'm hot. And I won't."

"Well, well, my dear, don't give Miss Stafford the idea that I am a domestic tyrant," said Mr. Charteris, with a slight frown. "As for Christian Science, it is in its infancy, of course. But it has produced some most gratifying results. Don't you agree with me, Miss Stafford?"

"I'm afraid I don't," replied Anne. "I acknowledge, of course, that they have got hold of a wonderful truth; but they have got hold of it by the wrong end."

"A truth has neither end nor beginning," said her host rather pompously. "One cannot argue

with an unbeliever, of course; but countless evidences have been given that pain and disease are mere chimeras which have been dispersed by healthy faith and conviction."

"But, Alfred, how can you say there is no such thing as pain!" interposed Frances, making her pretty eyes quite round. "Don't you remember a few weeks ago when your finger was jammed in the door of a railway-carriage, and you said the agony was intolerable? You know you did, and you swore dreadfully."

"I dare say," was the impatient answer. "I was taken by surprise. Besides, that was an isolated instance."

"No it wasn't, dear, because, if you remember ——"

"We need not pursue the matter further, I think," interrupted her husband in a chilly voice. "Religion and politics are subjects that only bear discussing in a *tête-à-tête* between friends whose opinions are alike."

"What might be called an 'exactly so' discussion," said the irrepressible Eric. "As for politics — well, the word is almost obsolete, I should think. It used to mean the science or art of government, didn't it? There's precious little science or art in old St. Stephen's now — or of government either."

"There's plenty of art," put in Anne. "But

it's the wrong kind of art. And plenty of government — of sorts."

"Is Budget-making an art?" asked Frances. "Because a man told me at the Desboroughs' last night that the next Budget is going to be scandalous. What do you think? They are going to tax artificial hair, and teeth, and complexions. So some people will have to pay up, or else go about frights for the rest of their days."

Anne laughed joyously.

"It wouldn't be at all a bad idea," she said. "And I'm sure it would bring in a substantial revenue. Let us write and suggest it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. For I'm afraid, Frances, your friend was only chaffing."

"Oh, don't talk of the Budget; it is iniquitous," exclaimed Mr. Charteris, turning pale purple.

For though his income was fairly large, it was unearned, and the last Budget had hit him hard.

"If there's no tax on going to the play, we'd better start," suggested Eric cheerfully. "Let's have a glass of Chartreuse all round to warm us up. My inside would give points to an up-to-date refrigerator."

"Eric, really — what will Anne think?" remonstrated Frances.

"She will think, like you and me, that my

beloved brother must have been an Esquimaux in a previous state of existence. Until his next fad comes on, and then he may turn out to have been a salamander."

The play they went to see was one which — rightly or wrongly — has shaken England; and Frances, who was emotional, cried bitterly.

Charteris, half-annoyed, half-distressed, tried to console her.

"Don't be foolish, my love," he said. "It's all nonsense. It couldn't possibly happen. God bless my soul, what is our navy for? The thing isn't possible."

"But it seems so awful — so quite possible," she sobbed, dabbing her eyes wildly with a tiny handkerchief. "I shall buy a book on first aid to-morrow. You can get them for a shilling."

"Well, well, there can be no objection to that. All women should know how to tie a bandage. But try to control yourself. People are looking at you."

"Suppose they are — I don't care! They always do. I've got on a French frock, and my hair is dressed in the latest fashion. Let them look. Oh mercy, there's another shell! And look at the dust! Fancy, if they shelled our flat! Alfred — I'm going to scream. Take me out, quick!"

Alfred obeyed with alacrity.

"You will bring Miss Stafford home, Eric?" he said hurriedly.

"Right oh!" agreed Eric. "Now, please don't move, Miss Stafford. Frances will be all right when she gets home. She is tender-hearted and easily upset, poor little soul! You and I will stay to the bitter end."

As they got into a taxi-cab when the performance was over, Anne caught sight of Carroll and another man walking rapidly past the theatre.

Carroll saw her, and lifted his hat. Anne fancied he did not look particularly pleased.

Eric turned to her in surprise.

"Do you know Carroll?" he asked. "I shouldn't have thought that he would be likely to be a friend of yours."

"I am engaged to him," said Anne steadily.

"Oh, by Jove!" he ejaculated, in some dismay.

CHAPTER XV

NEXT morning, quite early, a very tearful Elfie came to Anne for consolation.

"Oh, Anne, I'm very miserable!" she sobbed. "They won't let me speak to Mr. Carroll. And yesterday I met him on the stairs and told him, and his eyes looked so vexed. But he said if daddy said I mustn't speak to him, I mustn't. And I cried, and all the oranges fell downstairs."

Anne's eyes grew cold, and she put the child away from her.

"You have forgotten, then," she said, "how kind Mr. Carroll was to you at Blasyllan?"

"No, no, Anne, dear Anne — I haven't forgotten! But — I'm afraid of daddy. Even mummy is."

"If your father and mother do not wish you to speak to Mr. Carroll, they will not wish you to speak to me," went on Anne, still in that chilly, formal voice. "I am going to be married to him one day."

"Oh, Anne — what day?"

"I don't know."

Elfie flung her arms round Anne's neck.

"Oh, I am glad — awfully glad!" she whispered. "I *know* he hasn't done anything wicked, as daddy and mummy think he has. And, of course, you know he hasn't, or you wouldn't be going to marry him. I wish I was grown up, and then I needn't care what daddy says. Anne, will you give Mr. Carroll my love, and tell him I will always love him just the same, though I mayn't speak to him?"

"Yes, dear," said Anne, as she kissed the tear-stained cheeks.

"Does mummy know you are going to marry Mr. Carroll?" the child asked presently.

"No, I don't think so."

"May I tell her?"

"Yes, if you like."

"What shall I do, Anne dear, if daddy says I mustn't speak to you either?" inquired Elfie, after another silence.

"I don't know, Elfie. I suppose you will have to do as your father tells you."

"Oh, Anne, it would break my heart!"

"You dear, funny little thing — baby hearts don't break so easily. As the days went on you would forget me."

"Oh, Anne, as if I could! It is quite cruel of you to say that! I should cry every day and every night."

But Anne smiled and kissed her again, and finally sent her away, telling her she was going to be busy. And when the child had gone, she sat down and wrote diligently until lunch-time.

In the late afternoon Carroll came in. He looked as if he were in rather a bad temper, Anne thought. And she at once divined why. It was because he had seen her driving away from Wyndham's Theatre with Eric Charteris on the previous evening. And his first words confirmed her suspicion.

"Who was the man you were with last night?" he asked, trying to speak carelessly, and succeeding not at all.

"It was Frances Charteris's brother-in-law," Anne replied, with her sunniest smile. "I dined with them last night, and we went to Wyndham's afterwards."

"Did you and young Charteris go by yourselves?" inquired Carroll, with a lowering brow.

"Oh no. Frances and her husband went too. But the noise and the firing made her nervous. So her husband took her home, and the boy and I followed when the play was over."

"Anne," he said at last desperately, "it's no use blinking it, I'm jealous, infernally jealous, of every man who looks at you. I could have strangled that young cub last night because he was sitting beside you and I wasn't. And yet

— I can't ask you to marry me, though I love you with all my soul."

"Are you married already?" asked Anne unexpectedly.

"Why do you ask that?" he said in a resentful tone. "You know very well I am not."

"You never said so. And do you know, Brian, I am far from sure that you really do love me."

"Oh, Anne, you are awfully cruel. If I talked from now until to-morrow, I couldn't tell you half how much I love you."

"As for that 'young cub,' as you rather unkindly call him," Anne went on demurely — "for he is really a nice young cub — I told him last night that I was engaged to you."

A sudden light leapt into Carroll's eyes.

"You told him that?" he said, gripping her hands in his. "Oh, my dear — you know very well I *dare* not ask you to share my lonely life. God knows it is for your sake I am putting away this chance of perfect happiness."

"You wouldn't be lonely if you had me," she answered cheerfully. "And I shouldn't be lonely if I had you. Of course, we don't want to marry one another just yet; we shall wait till later. But I shall certainly tell everyone I am engaged to you. Because I am proud of it. And, incidentally, I am proud of you."

"I wonder if there is another woman like you in all the world," he said indistinctly.

"No," she answered, with a murmuring little laugh. "I am an absolutely unique person. I am the one and only Anne."

"You are sure you have thought it well over," he said earnestly. "You understand that I can never clear my name — never? You understand that all your relations and friends will drop you ——"

"Bless their hearts, let them," laughed Anne. "I have very few friends, and I wish my relations would drop me. Except Jim, of course. And he will believe in you because I do."

"You do believe in me?" he whispered unsteadily.

She laid her head against his as he knelt beside her.

"Yes, my own dear, I believe in you. Nothing could shake my belief. Whether your pride will ever let us be married or not does not matter. I shall always belong to you. It seems strange that I should humble myself to you in this way, Brian. For, do you know, I used to think I was quite a dignified person."

Her lips trembled a little as she spoke. And he kissed them into quiescence.

"My dear love," he said, half under his breath. "With all my heart I thank God that in my

loneliness He has given me the love and trust of a good woman."

She did not answer, but nestled in his arms with a sigh of content.

Suddenly he took her face between his hands, and gazed steadily into her eyes.

"You are sure," he said in a low voice, "that you have no fear of our ostracized life together? Think, Anne — think carefully. I am a disgraced man in the eyes of the world. Our children would have the right to reproach us."

She put her little hand over his lips.

"I have thought of everything. And I am afraid of nothing — except of losing you," she answered.

Anne never forgot the flash of mingled pride and tenderness that swept over his face. For the moment he looked like a happy, enthusiastic boy.

"Then we will be married at once," he said quietly.

But Anne's cheeks grew pink as she shook her head.

"Oh no, no," she replied. "I did not mean that at all. We will be engaged for at least six months. You know we have only known one another since February."

"If we have known one another long enough to love one another, we have known one another

long enough to be married," he said, drawing her nearer to him.

"Oh, Brian, what a sentence! What would your publishers and editors say?" she answered.

"Anne, don't let us trifle with our happiness," he entreated. "I see now that you were right, and I was wrong. Let us be happy while we can. Who knows what may happen? If you are not afraid of a life with only me to take the place of all other ties — if you do not shrink from the stain of the crime I am supposed to have committed, come to me, my darling, and let us begin a new life together now. There need be no delay. I can get a special license, and we can go away at once for our journey into Paradise. Anne — should you like to go to Blasyllan?"

"Yes, by-and-by," she answered, with a winsome but inflexible smile that he was beginning to know. "Dear — I will marry you exactly six months from now. Will not that content you? We can see one another every day. If I screamed, you could hear me."

They argued for nearly an hour. But Anne was obdurate. She was only a woman, and it may have been that as Brian's defences had been so difficult to surmount, she was not averse to his finding hers no less difficult. Finally he was obliged to give in, with the sole advantage that

the delay should be for five months instead of six.

"October!" he said. "Oh, Anne, the time will never pass."

She smiled up at him.

"You unreasonable boy! Have you forgotten that barely an hour ago you were resigned to the time never coming?"

"Yes — that is true," he admitted. "But everything seems quite different now. Before I was like a child who wanted a far-away star. Now the star is almost within my reach. But I can't get any nearer to it — until October."

After that day they looked upon themselves as betrothed lovers. They went everywhere together, saw each other every day, and from Anne's point of view were really very happy. But to Carroll the calendar seemed meaningless until September should give place to October. He gave Anne a latchkey for his door, and she did likewise. So that it was nothing unusual for her to come in and find him in her sitting-room — or for him to find her waiting for him in his. This was rather indiscreet, perhaps, but Anne was irate against Mrs. Grundy and her myrmidons just then. For Mrs. Hargrave had cut her dead twice in Earlscourt Road, and neither Elfie nor her mother had come to see

her since the night at Wyndham's Theatre. Anne had called once, but had found Mrs. Charteris "not at home." And she resented these slights, not so much on her own account as on Brian's. But she did not tell him of them.

One day at the beginning of June she went into his flat to ask his opinion on a letter she had to answer by the afternoon's post.

As she pushed open the sitting-room door, she said:

"I want your advice, dear, about this letter ——"

She stopped short. For it was not her lover who rose from the depths of the easy-chair by the window.

"I am so sorry," said a refined, courteous voice, "but Mr. Carroll has gone out. He may be back very soon, or not for some time. Can I give him any message from you?"

"No, thank you," was the somewhat haughty answer. "It does not matter at all."

And just then Carroll himself came in.

He took both Anne's hands in his, and kissed her.

Then he turned to Musgrave, and said quietly:

"Barney, let me introduce you to Miss Stafford, my future wife. Anne, this is a very dear old friend of mine, Barney Musgrave. He, like you, refuses to believe anything to my discredit."

Anne held out her hand with a radiant smile.

"Then, of course, he must be my friend too," she said cordially.

"I congratulate you both," said Barney, looking down at Anne's charming face with evident approval.

"How do you know you ought to congratulate Mr. Carroll?" asked Anne, meeting the speaker's blue eyes gravely.

"Because," was the equally grave answer, "he always gets the best of everything. He always did, even as a boy."

"Did he?" she replied, glancing at Carroll with a look in her dark eyes that gladdened his heart. "Then I'm sure he deserved it. I always told you, Brian, that I knew you must have been a delightful little boy."

"I was considered a singularly engaging child," observed Barney, rather sadly. "Cannot you see traces of delightful boyhood in me too, Miss Stafford?"

"On the contrary, I'm sure you belonged to the *enfant terrible* species, and that your elders were never happy unless you were sound asleep in bed," laughed Anne.

"I can assure you I was a child in a thousand," remonstrated Musgrave. "Fears were entertained that I should not outgrow my saintly babyhood. At the age of five I ——"

But Carroll interrupted him, laying an affectionate hand on his shoulder.

"Dear old boy, spare us your appallingly mendacious reminiscences. You know you were the terror of the country-side from the time you could walk until your first love-affair. Anne, will you preside over our simple tea-table?"

"Certainly. Or won't you both come and have tea with me? My tea-table is set, and the kettle nearly boiling. And Mrs. Watkins has scrubbed the windows until you can see through them quite easily."

"But shall we not interfere with your writing?" asked Carroll. "Are you not busy or anything?"

"I don't write at tea-time," she answered. "It won't take any more of my time to preside over my tea-table than to preside over yours."

"Is he always so particular about encroaching upon your valuable time?" inquired Barney, with a subdued twinkle in his eyes. "I don't think I should be."

"No. This is simply a disgracefully obvious pose for your benefit, Mr. Musgrave. As a rule his attitude towards my work is quite different. You know it is, Brian."

They were in Anne's sitting-room by this time, and Barney proceeded to help Anne to make the tea.

It was a merry little tea-party, and Anne told Brian afterwards that she felt as if she had known his friend for years. And Brian was genuinely pleased.

Barney stayed for about half an hour after they had finished tea, then plead an important engagement, and took his departure.

"What a delightful person!" said Anne, when Carroll had helped her to clear away the tea-things.

"Yes, he's a decent chap," acquiesced Carroll. "I have an absolute affection for old Barney."

"And yet you said you had no friends," remonstrated Anne. "Don't you remember?"

"Yes. But I didn't know then that Barney was loyal to me. He's been abroad for years."

"I am sure he is very fond of you," she answered. "I could see that. It pleased me so much."

"We have always been chums, he and I. He is one of the best, is Barney."

"You look tired, Brian. Are you?" she asked suddenly.

"No; but I have a beast of a headache."

"Then lean back in that big chair and rest, and I will play to you."

In the darkest corner of Anne's sitting-room stood an old-fashioned square piano of mahogany. Anne used it chiefly as a table upon which

to heap books and papers and magazines, and rarely played upon it except at Carroll's request. It was by a good maker, and had a very sweet, soft tone. Carroll knew little of music from a musician's point of view; but Anne's playing appealed to him and soothed him. She had a delicate yet firm touch, and put much of her soul into whatever she interpreted. She had a curiously fascinating voice too, though it was neither strong nor well trained.

When she had played dreamy fragments for about a quarter of an hour, Carroll said:

"Sing to me, Anne. Sing that old thing, 'The Watermill.' The tune bewitched me the last time you sang it, and I dreamed last night that we were singing it together in Westminster Abbey."

Anne played a queer little minor prelude, and then sang, in a low, crooning voice:

"Listen to the water-mill through the livelong day,
How the clicking of its wheel wears the hours away.
Languidly the autumn wind stirs the forest leaves;
From the fields the reapers sing, binding up their sheaves.
And a proverb haunts my mind, as a spell is cast —
'The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.'

"Autumn winds revive no more leaves that once are shed,
And the sickle cannot reap corn once gathered.
Flows the ruffled streamlet on, tranquil, deep, and still —
Never gliding back again to the water-mill.

Truly speaks that proverb old, with a meaning vast —
'The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.'

"Take the lesson to thyself, true and loving heart —
Golden youth is fleeting by, summer hours depart.
Learn to make the most of life, lose no happy day;
Time will never bring thee back chances swept away.
Leave no tender word unsaid, love while love shall last —
'The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.'

"Work while yet the daylight shines, man of strength and will;
Never does the streamlet glide useless past the mill.
Wait not till to-morrow's sun beams upon thy way;
All that thou canst call thine own lies in thy 'to-day.'
Power, and intellect, and health may not always last —
'The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.'

"Ah, the wasted hours of life that have drifted by,
Ah, the good that 'might have been,' lost without a sigh.
Love that we might once have saved by a single word,
Thoughts conceived, but never penned, perishing unheard.
Take the proverb to thy heart, take, and hold it fast —
'The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.'"

"Your singing-voice is very sweet, Anne," said Carroll, when the last notes had throbbed themselves away; "but I think I like even better to hear you talk."

She left the piano, and came and sat on a low footstool beside his chair, leaning her head against his knee.

"I thought you had gone to sleep," she said reprovingly. "Why didn't you? It would have done your head good."

"Did you really think I should go to sleep, Anne — with your voice in my ears?"

"You won't say that twenty years after this," she said, rubbing her cheek against his hand. "You will sleep quite unmoved while I sing the very newest songs, and only wake now and then to put coals on the fire, and rustle the newspaper, and say, 'Very pretty, my dear.'"

He stroked her hair lovingly.

"Twenty years!" he repeated. "I shall be fifty-five, Anne. A middle-aged man, gray, and rather bald, and somewhat stout."

"You may be gray," she said — "I should rather like it — but I am sure you will never be either stout or bald. Doesn't it seem strange," she went on dreamily, "that you and I should have found each other before it was too late for one or both of us? We might have wandered on through all our lives, looking — looking — and waiting. And you might never have come to me, and I might never have come to you. Or — I might have come to you when you were married to someone else, or you might have come to me when I was married to someone else. And behold — we floated almost on to one another's doorstep."

His arm tightened round her, but he did not speak.

"Sometimes I wonder," she went on, half under her breath, "if I shall wake up and find I have dreamed it all. Who knows? Perhaps at this moment I am asleep in bed at Warrender Grange, and I shall gradually come back to consciousness, and realize that all my wonderful happiness is only a dream — and that you and Boxer are dreams too."

Boxer, hearing his name, opened one eye, and then went to sleep again.

"Poor little child!" said Carroll somewhat gloomily. "Perhaps it would be better for you if you could wake up and find it all a dream."

"Perhaps it would, dear. Perhaps you would like me to say to you, 'Well, really, Mr. Carroll, I think, after all, we have made a mistake. I think it would be a happier fate for me if I became engaged to a publisher or an editor, who would take all my work, however inferior — until we were married.'"

"Foolish Anne!" Carroll said half sadly. "What a light-hearted, gay little creature you are! It doesn't take much to make you happy."

"Does it not indeed? You are very much mistaken, my good Brian. It takes a very great deal to make me happy. At least two hundred

and fifty separate items. And you — you dear old thing — embody them all."

"Do I? I hope you will always think so."

"I am quite sure I shall. My dear, listen to me. From a child, I have always known exactly what I wanted. There was never any doubt about that. The thing was — to get it. Brian — shall I tell you something?"

"Dear heart, yes. I thought you told me everything."

"Well — do you remember that first day we met each other? In the lift, you know? And then when Boxer upset the lamp, and you helped me to pick it up. And then — we talked."

"Do I remember? I wonder? As if you didn't know that for a time I was in danger of forgetting everything else."

"Ah, Brian, do be serious. Well, that night, when I was in bed, before I went to sleep, I looked out of the window — I always sleep with the blind drawn up to the very top — and I thought that if I ever married, I should like my husband — to be not *very* unlike — you."

"Sweetheart, did you really?"

"Yes — didn't you?"

"Didn't I what?"

"Think that I should be nice to talk to — always?" Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on: "You know, Brian, I am awfully

glad that you are — well, not very well off. Of course, I know you have enough to keep you from poverty — just as I have — but I like the kind of feeling that I love you well enough, and that you love me well enough, to know that we shall just have enough to scrape along, and yet be quite content with that, and no more. Oh, my dear, I *am* so happy!"

"Thank God!" he said tenderly. "And what about me, my little girl? Do you know how happy I am, I wonder? Have you any idea how very different my outlook on life is since you came into it?"

"It all began with Boxer, bless him!" said Anne, pouncing on Boxer so suddenly that he awoke with a bark, under the impression that a cat had attacked him in his sleep. "Do you remember the eggs, Brian — and the appalling state of my dress? How I hated you both that day!" Then she added, after a silence: "Tell me truly, what did you think of me that first day? I know I've asked you before, but never mind. I agree with Socrates as to the constant repetition of whatever is true. Not that I agree with him in all he says. Nor do I consider him so wonderfully wise. I think his sayings half the time were so obviously and irritatingly worked up for effect. I wouldn't put him in the same room as dear old Marcus Aurelius."

"I suppose he loses in the translation — Socrates, I mean," said Brian, smiling slightly. "It's extraordinary how most women pin their faith to Marcus Aurelius."

"I thought you didn't know any women?" she asked quickly.

"I used to know a good many. I was not always a social outcast."

"There, don't frown. It doesn't suit you a bit. You were going to tell me what you thought of me that first day when Boxer introduced us."

"You know I thought you had the temper of a little tigress. You know, also, that I thought you rather pretty."

"Only rather? That sounds rather tame."

"I didn't know all your expressions then. After the lamp episode I thought you exceedingly pretty, and now — I don't think you pretty at all."

"*Brian!*" This in a curiously dismayed tone.

"No — I don't think you pretty at all," he went on tranquilly. "I think you are simply the loveliest woman in the world."

"Ah, that is better," she said, looking relieved. "For the moment I felt as if you had slapped me, or poured cold water over my head."

"But it is not only your personal appearance that appeals to me, you ridiculously vain Anne.

It is your voice and your ways. You have the most bewitching ways."

"Brian, I never realized before what a really clever and discerning person you are. I could listen to this for hours. This is genius."

He laughed as he rose to his feet.

"Put on your hat and come for a walk," he said. "Do you suppose I'm going to spoil you by talking nonsense to you until dinner-time? I've finished my article for the *Fortnightly,* and if you haven't done your literary day's work, you ought to have done. If you are to belong to me, I can't have you spoiling your eyes by scribbling morning, noon, and night."

"If I didn't belong to you, I suppose it wouldn't matter what I did with my eyes," she flung back at him as she went to get her hat.

"There's a finely-matched pair, if ever there was one," said Dawson, the hall-porter, to Mrs. Watkins, who happened to come in at the main door of the flats as Anne and Carroll passed out. "I hope I'll see them drive away in a carriage and pair and a cloud of rice one of these days, though I've heard that he's married, and has a wife somewhere on the sly."

"Well there, George Dawson, what an evil mind you must have, to think such things of a fine-looking, clever gentleman like Mr. Carroll!" said Mrs. Watkins indignantly.

"Good looks and cleverness don't keep a man from having a wife on the sly," answered George, with some truth; then he added: "I married on the sly myself, Mrs. Watkins, and only was sorry for it once, and that was ever since."

"Well, I'm only a widow, of course; but I think I'm as good a judge of a gentleman's character as anyone else," said Mrs. Watkins. "And if Mr. Carroll ain't a bachelor — well, he isn't, that's all. But I'd take my virgin oath he is."

"Then what's the kind of secretness about him?" said George, lowering his voice. "The Charterises' house-parlormaid says she's heard them talking about it at meals. He never has no visitors, except that tall thin gent with the eyeglasses, and he's only come lately."

Mrs. Watkins grew crimson, and her eyes glittered ominously; for she considered Anne and Carroll her own exclusive property.

"You'd better mind your own business, George Dawson, and not stand there taking away the characters of them as has given you trousers and waistcoats unknown, not to mention tips and other benefits. Stick up for Mr. Carroll I will, though I may fall dead this minute."

"Bless my soul, I ain't sayin' nothing against him, Mrs. Watkins. It was only that the Charterises' house-parlormaid ——"

"The Charterises' house-parlormaid's a chat-

tering minx," snapped Mrs. Watkins, "and you're a fool to waste your time gossiping with her."

And she flounced downstairs.

CHAPTER XVI

ONE day it occurred to Anne and Carroll to go to the Zoo together.

It was a lovely afternoon of June, and a velvety breeze tempered the blazing sunshine.

"I haven't been here for years," said Carroll, as they passed the turnstile.

"Oh, I often come, especially when I feel a little 'humpy,'" said Anne. "So many of the animals look so delightfully human — only more so. Wasn't it Thackeray who said somewhere: 'If I have cares on my mind, I come to the Zoo, and fancy they don't pass the gate. I recognize my friends, my enemies, in countless cages. I entertained the eagle, the vulture, the old billy-goat, and the black-pated, crimson-necked, blear-eyed, baggy, hook-beaked, old marabout stork, yesterday at dinner'? You observe he said 'yesterday at dinner,' not 'last night at dinner.' I suppose they dined in daylight in his day. How I wish I had lived in these delightful old times, Brian! Don't you?"

"No. We shouldn't have known one another.

Colecourt Mansions were neither built nor thought of. Mrs. Grundy was in her most robust youth in Thackeray's time. She would never have allowed us to become acquainted in any but the most orthodox way."

"Talking of Mrs. Grundy," said Anne, "let us go and look at the ostriches. There is one tall haughty one, the color of Jaegar underclothing, that is the very image of Mrs. Hargrave. It advances towards one with exactly her walk and the set of her shoulders. I always laugh till I cry when I see it."

"Are you going to laugh till you cry to-day?" asked Carroll, smiling as he looked down at her. "Because if you are, I shall disclaim all acquaintance with you."

However, he was quite as much amused by the Jaegar-colored ostrich's resemblance to Mrs. Hargrave as Anne could have desired. And there really was an absurd and quite startling likeness.

"Doesn't it look shocked and prudish?" gurgled Anne. "In a minute or two I know it will say: 'My dear Miss Stafford, I feel it is only my duty to tell you that as an earnest Christian I can *not* approve of your coming to the Zoological Gardens alone with a young *man*.'"

The ostrich, however, made no remark, but merely subjected them to a long and insolent

stare, then turned round disdainfully, and with a mincing gait exactly like Mrs. Hargrave's walked away. Its short, fluffy wings, too, were vividly reminiscent of a feather cape worn by that lady on most occasions and in all weathers, and Anne went into fits of laughter.

It was a very happy, peaceful day for both — as they remembered later. They wandered hither and thither, and laughed at the comically pompous penguins, and smiled at the pathetic seals. They lingered at the antelope paddocks, and one graceful creature came close to the palings, and pushed its muzzle into Anne's hand.

"It knows me," she said, as she rubbed the roots of its horns caressingly. "I always call it Daisy."

"It has eyes exactly like yours," commented Carroll.

They went to the lion-house, and watched these poor caged creatures of the desert as they paced ceaselessly and monotonously backwards and forwards, or crouched sullenly in corners of their cages. Anne bestowed many a pitying glance on them and on the restless wolves and jackals.

"Poor captive things!" she said, with a sigh. "I'm sure their hearts ache as ours would do if we were exiled in some foreign land where we never ceased to pine for home. Their gloomy

eyes always seem to be saying, 'How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'"

"You ridiculously sentimental little goose!" he answered banteringly. "They don't manage so badly. Listen to that!"

As he spoke a terrific roar from the lion-house was echoed again and again by the occupants of the neighboring cages.

Anne pushed her arm through her companion's.

"I hate to hear it," she whispered nervously. "It makes my heart beat so hard. And I always think, in a kind of panic — 'what if they got out!'"

"But they couldn't. And if they did, they would probably ignore both you and me."

"Ah, you would speak differently if one sprang at you. How should you feel then?"

"I have experienced it, my dear child — though not here. It isn't exactly a pleasant experience, of course. But still, it is not without its charm."

"Then have you killed lions — tigers — and all these creatures, Brian? Why, you never told me."

"Yes, I have accounted for a few. I didn't know you were interested in sanguinary sports. Anne, aren't you hungry? It is nearly two o'clock. Let us go and have something to eat."

They had lunch in a long many-windowed room, where the sun stole in through down-drawn blinds. Anne declared that she was not in the least hungry. Nevertheless, she ate a very fair lunch, and enjoyed it. Carroll declared he was ravenous, and ate scarcely anything at all.

When they came out into the sunlight again, Anne was at once attracted by a fascinating little squirrel who ran gaily up a neighboring tree, ran down, accepted a nut from a pretty American girl, and ran up again.

"Isn't it a dear?" Anne said, as she stood on tiptoe to watch it. "And it is quite happy, you see, because it isn't shut up."

Here a clear childish voice behind her said, in a tone of marked distress, and with a still more marked lack of grammar:

"Yes, it's them. I said it was. Oh, Uncle Eric, what would you do if you was me?"

Anne turned suddenly, and her face changed and hardened. She bowed to Eric, nodded distantly to Elfie, and was passing on, when the child flung herself, sobbing hysterically, into her arms.

"Oh, Anne! oh, Mr. Carroll! don't both walk away as if you had never seen me. Uncle Eric says I needn't always play up to daddy's fads. And mummy went to see you one day, but you were out. Uncle Eric — do tell Anne to speak

to me. And this is Mr. Carroll, who was so very kind when I was ill."

The two men acknowledged one another's existence in silence. Then Eric, who was never silent for long, said genially:

"Shall we sit down and have a cigarette, and leave Miss Stafford to comfort the little one?"

Carroll acquiesced, though somewhat unwillingly, and Anne conveyed Elfie to another seat some hundred yards or so away, and coaxed her into silence.

Gradually the child's sobs ceased, and at last she clapped her hands gleefully.

"Why, Anne, what a little stupid I am! Daddy only said I wasn't to speak to Mr. Carroll on the stairs. He didn't say anything about the Zoo. So I can speak to him as much as I like here."

And she scrambled down, and raced over to Carroll, upon whose knee she perched at once. And he, noting the flushed cheeks and tear-wet lashes, had not the heart to put her down.

Eric rose and strolled over to where Anne was still sitting.

"Miss Stafford," he said, somewhat awkwardly, "I don't want to seem cheeky. But didn't you tell me that you were engaged to Carroll?"

"Yes," she answered, haughtily enough.

"Well, you know, that night when you told me — when we were coming from Wyndham's, you know — I thought — upon my soul, I did — that it was Felix Carroll we saw, and that you said you were engaged to. They are not unlike in height and build. And there's a kind of family likeness. So I wanted to explain," he added, still more awkwardly. "A chap I know knows this Carroll — Brian is his name, isn't it? And he thinks no end of him, and says he's been treated shamefully."

"Oh," said Anne, in a frigid tone.

"Of course, you know the kind of things people say," went on Eric, digging his cane industriously into the gravel. "But my friend — Lascelles his name is, Ned Lascelles — says that it is gradually getting about that Carroll — your Carroll, I mean — is screening someone else. Lascelles found out his address, and wrote to him; but Carroll wrote back, saying that he had given up seeing people, and that his work took up all his time, or some rot of that kind. So, of course, a chap can't force his company on another chap."

"No," agreed Anne, still coldly. Then she added: "Do you think Mr. Carroll will like our discussing his private affairs?"

The young man looked decidedly abashed.

"Well — not in an ordinary way, perhaps.

But still, you know, as you are engaged to him ——"

"If you were engaged to anyone," went on Anne, turning to look at him, "should you like her to discuss your private affairs with a stranger?"

"Oh, well — I'm not exactly a stranger, am I?" Eric remonstrated in rather a hurt voice.

Anne raised her eyebrows.

"This is the second time I have met you," she replied calmly.

"Is that all? By Jove! I feel as if I had known you for ages. And Elfie talks of you such a lot."

Anne was silent for a few seconds, then she said:

"It is very kind of you to wish to be friendly. But as your brother and his wife have forbidden their little daughter to speak to Mr. Carroll ——"

"But, I say, you mustn't misjudge poor Frances," the boy interrupted her eagerly. "You know what my brother is — or perhaps you don't. He's decent enough in some things, but in others he's no end of a — well, to speak plainly, a nuisance. And Frances is awfully fond of you. As you heard the kid say, she called on you the other day, but you were out, and she hadn't a card."

"Mr. Charteris is, of course, quite at liberty

to dictate to his wife as to her choice of friends," said Anne, with a chilly smile. "I should be very sorry to be the cause of any disagreement between them. I hope to be married to Mr. Carroll in October. Therefore his friends are mine, and his enemies are mine too."

"Well, anyway, you won't chuck my friendship," said young Charteris anxiously. "It's hardly fair that I should suffer because of Alf's confounded priggishness. And it's awfully hard on poor little Elfie. However, Alf's a fearfully erratic chap, and he thinks a lot of Lascelles, so very likely he'll change his opinion of Carroll when he hears what Lascelles has to say."

A curious smile crept round Anne's mouth.

"Does Mr. Carroll strike you as the type of man to be ignored one day and made much of the next?" she asked sweetly. "I think your brother will find that he is not vitally important in Mr. Carroll's career."

She rose as she spoke, and followed in the wake of Carroll and Elfie, who were walking slowly in the direction of the elephant-house, Elfie explaining volubly to her companion that there was an elephant who danced round and round if you offered him a biscuit. This performance over, Carroll looked at his watch, and suggested to Anne that they should turn homeward.

As Elfie said good-by to him, she entreated with wistful eyes:

"Can I come and see you one day, and play with Boxer, and see your pictures?"

"No, Elfie, I think not," he answered gravely, but not unkindly.

The little one winked away two unruly tears, and said, as she looked up at Anne:

"Then may I come to see you, Anne dear? Mademoiselle de Cornay is coming on Monday, so I suppose I'll have to trail her about with me everywhere," she said, sighing dismally.

Anne hesitated. And Carroll answered for her:

"I think your mother would not object to your going to see Miss Stafford."

"But will Anne object?"

"No, I don't think she will."

"Will Anne still let me come when you are married to her, Mr. Carroll?"

"Oh, I say, kid, come along," exclaimed Eric, catching her by the arm. "Don't you want to see the baby bears before you go home?"

Elfie suffered herself to be led away, looking very disconsolate.

"Poor little soul!" said Anne regretfully. "She is so fond of you, Brian. And I really fail to see why Mr. Charteris should take upon himself to ——"

"The way of transgressors is hard, we are told," he answered, with a slight movement of his shoulders. "I am afraid you will find that increasingly evident when we have journeyed a little farther together on life's journey, Anne."

"Oh — transgressors," exclaimed Anne impatiently. "But there are no remarks about scapegoats, that I can remember."

"The scapegoat theory is entirely your own idea, my little Anne — at least, yours and Barney's."

They had passed through the turnstile by this time, and were walking slowly along the tree-shaded road westwards.

"Brian," she began hesitatingly, "now that we have decided to belong to one another, don't you think you might take me entirely into your confidence? Of course, I know, as well as everybody who really cares for you must know, that you are absolutely incapable of committing such a mean crime as forgery — so you must be exiling yourself voluntarily for someone's sake. Won't you tell me about it? You know I am absolutely safe."

"Anne," he said very tenderly, "have you forgotten that you assured me you could trust me, and that you would ask no more questions?"

"I do trust you, Brian dear. But I don't see

why you should suffer for someone else's crime. It seems so — so unnecessary."

"Can you think of any reason why I should shield anyone except that I think it is absolutely necessary?" he asked quietly.

"Then — you are shielding someone?" she said in a low voice.

He lit a cigarette, and threw away the match, but did not answer.

After a long pause Anne spoke again.

"Brian, is it — is it for the sake of some — some woman that you are doing this?"

His face hardened and became somewhat paler than usual.

"I don't care about being cross-examined, my dear — even by the woman who has promised to be my wife," he answered quietly.

Something in his tone stung her. And she said what perhaps in a calmer moment she would not have said.

"It is some secret about a woman, then?" she exclaimed in a trembling voice. "It is — I can see. You can't deny it."

"Shall we take a cab?" he said quietly. "The passers-by are becoming rather interested in our conversation."

He hailed a taxi-cab as he spoke, helped her in, and having directed the driver to Colecourt Mansions, took his seat beside her.

Then he said in a voice that showed that he was putting some restraint upon himself:

"Once before, Anne, you asked me a question you had hardly any right to ask me. It was at Blasyllan, when, if you remember, I told you that a problem had come into my life which harassed and baffled me. The problem, as I did not tell you then, but as you know now, was as to whether or not I had any right to your friendship, when I knew that my feeling to you was no longer friendship. You asked me then if my trouble was about a woman — women always think men's troubles are about women — and if it was because of her that I was under a cloud."

"Yes, I remember," put in Anne, her voice softening as the glamour of these golden days came over her memory. "I remember that you would not tell me then. And I respected you for it afterwards, because — oh, because it was so like you. But now, dear — now that we are everything to one another — wouldn't it ease your mind to trust me?"

"How like a woman," he said, with a queer smile, "to promise voluntarily to ask no questions, and then to break her promise without a qualm!"

"But — it is for your sake," she pleaded. "It is because I might be able to think of some way out."

"There is no way out," was the inflexible answer.

"But it is shameful that all our future life should be clouded by someone else's sin. It is not even fair to me. You must see that."

His eyes met hers sternly.

"Are you beginning to repent, Anne?" he asked.

"Are you?" she flashed out.

"I am beginning to think that we have been — unwise," he said, in a cold deliberate voice that made her heart sink.

It was quite true, as Carroll himself had acknowledged, that he had a very bad temper. It was not one of the tempers that run to raised voices, exaggerated speeches, or, indeed, any marked manifestations. But when it was once roused, it was rather difficult to conciliate.

Anne, however, did not know this. Her own temper was of the fiery, explosive kind that one associates with baffled and exasperated childhood. It blazed, flared, then died down, and forgot all dissension in a sunny calm.

"Then," she said, in a voice so choked with anger that she could hardly speak, "perhaps we had better break off our engagement at once."

"Very well," he answered sternly. "Let us do so, then. It was always a piece of folly on your part from the beginning."

Anne was silent, simply because she was in too fierce a passion to think of anything cruel enough to say.

Carroll was silent also, and his face wore an expression which was quite as much sorrowful as furious, though it was paradoxically characteristic of either state of mind.

And in this dumbness of sudden estrangement they reached Colecourt Mansions.

While Carroll paid the driver Anne rushed upstairs like a well-bred fury, let herself into her flat, and closed the door.

Boxer was sitting on Carroll's doormat. He had been away nearly all day upon an expedition of his own, and was awaiting his master's arrival to be let in. He was surprised that Anne made no response to his courteous greeting, but dismissed it as feminine caprice, and scampered off to greet Carroll, whose step he heard on the stairs.

Meanwhile Anne, in a tempest of rage, and grief, and incredulity, was standing at the open window of her sitting-room, gazing with dry, unseeing eyes at the houses opposite. It seemed hardly credible that Carroll should have accepted his dismissal so easily — without a word of protest or entreaty. He never could have really loved her, she told herself miserably.

In all her life she had never felt so passion-

ately angry. Suddenly her eyes fell upon the latchkey of Carroll's flat, the one he had given her to keep as her own. She wrapped it in a piece of newspaper, and, opening the hall-door, dropped it into his post-box, and knocked twice.

Then she retired into her own domain again, and sat at the window, listening, until it was quite dark.

By-and-by her anger began to die down, and her heart felt a little lighter. Brian could not really bear to give her up, she was quite sure. And when he saw that she had returned his key, he would certainly, though, of course, feeling hurt, come in during the evening, and all would be forgotten in the delight of reconciliation.

So she hastened through a scrambling supper, changed her gown for a pale green tea-gown that Carroll specially admired, took up a book, and sat down to wait.

She waited for a long time. Nine o'clock struck, then ten, then eleven. But Carroll had made no sign. She heard him take Boxer for his usual run, saw them go down the street, Boxer careering along in front like a mad thing, and his master actually smoking, as if nothing had happened.

Anne's temper had faded away now. A cold

fear seized her heart that her lover had taken her at her word. She took off the pretty green tea-gown, and crept into bed an hour later — a very unhappy Anne indeed.

CHAPTER XVII

ANNE really suffered a good deal during the next few days. For Brian still made no sign. It was almost incredible to her how she missed him — his companionship, his dependableness, the certainty of his love and near presence.

You see, it was not only that she had given him all her heart, this foolish Anne, but she had found in him such a satisfying and congenial comrade — in a word, such a reliable friend.

She was sorry now for her precipitate action regarding his latch-key, for she felt desperate enough to go to him and implore him to forgive her, regardless of proper pride and other conventionalities. An impulse to ring and insist on an interview, however brief, did occur to her momentarily. But on consideration she simply did not dare. Carroll's face could wear an expression at times that had given her a faint idea as to how implacable his resentment might be if thoroughly roused. And from his obstinate silence she feared it might be thoroughly roused now. Nor was she far wrong.

Elfie came in one day, but Anne received her

apathetically, and the little one went away, after a brief visit, dejected and crestfallen.

"Anne is not a bit like herself," she said to her mother in a mournful voice. "She is just sitting looking out of the window, and hardly speaks. And I am sure she has been crying or something."

I do not mean my readers to infer that Anne was so weak-minded as to give up her work entirely because she had quarrelled with her lover. On the contrary, she wrote steadily for at least seven or eight hours every day, and conscientiously tried to do good work. But it was not good work, and she knew it, and it inevitably found its way into the waste-paper basket. Her sentences were weak and unconvincing, she felt; her characters backboneless and uninteresting, as characters in fiction obstinately will be, when their creator is indifferent to their ultimate development. She sorely missed Carroll's trenchant criticism and clear judgment. And, almost unconsciously to herself, she was always listening — listening — for the step that did not come.

Jeer at her, hustling, bustling women of the modern masculine sisterhood. Can you imagine anything more undignified than to fret and allow your work to suffer, merely because one particular man has apparently vanished from your life's horizon? In these enlightened times, too, when

it has been so satisfactorily proved — that is to say, satisfactorily proved to a certain hysterical portion of the feminine community — that man is, after all, a very inferior item in the scheme of creation, and that women would be far wiser and more far-seeing as rulers of their country, and framers of its laws.

At least, so I heard a very excited elderly person declaiming scornfully the other day to a round-eyed audience of two or three pretty young girls.

I could not help feeling sorry for her, and wondering where she had lived, if she had never met any real men — men as God meant them to be — strong, earnest men, who, though invariably courteous and chivalrous to all women in virtue of their womanhood, would no more dream of allowing these women to snatch the reins of government from their hands than they would allow a three-year-old child to guide the levers of an express train. Woman has her time-honored, honorable place in the world. If, in order to fight shoulder to shoulder with men, she shirks her own responsibilities, who is to take up these responsibilities? But those of my readers who jeer at Anne will most certainly jeer equally at such sentiments as I have just written, so I shall return to this poor foolish young person who was only a woman — and not ashamed of it.

One afternoon, having written and torn up more pages than usual, Anne took her hat and sunshade and a book, and made her way to Kensington Gardens, intending to enter the Gardens by Queen's Gate. As she was about to cross Kensington Gore she saw Barney Musgrave coming towards her. He stopped and held out his hand with a pleased smile.

"How are you, Miss Stafford?" he exclaimed. "It seems an awfully long time since Carroll and I had tea with you that afternoon. How is the old boy? I haven't seen him lately. But I say, you are looking fearfully white and done up. Is anything wrong?"

"I am tired and hot," replied Anne, tilting her sunshade a little farther over her face. "It is some distance from here to Colecourt Mansions, you know. And I have walked all the way."

"And where are you going — if I may ask?" he inquired, trying to dodge the sunshade.

"I am going into the Gardens with a book. I have a fit of the blues, and can't get on with my writing."

"Then let me take you across the road. And may I walk with you for a little way? I haven't been in the Gardens for years. And you can send me away when you're tired of me."

Anne smiled a little.

"How does one politely intimate to people that one is tired of them?" she asked.

She was genuinely pleased to see Barney. It seemed the next best thing to seeing Brian himself.

He smiled too. Barney had a very winning smile. "I haven't an idea," he answered. "But if you look at your watch twice, or yawn three times, or allow your attention to wander persistently from what I may be saying, then I shall know that I have received marching orders, and retire in good form."

When they had turned into the Flower Walk, Musgrave suggested that they should sit down.

"You don't look at all fit," he said anxiously, as he seated himself beside her. "I don't want to seem prying or curious, but I can't help thinking that something is the matter."

"Have you seen Mr. Carroll lately?" she asked, in what she considered a fairly steady voice.

"No — not for some little time," he answered, a faint tinge of surprise in his pleasant tone. Then he added interrogatively: "You have — of course?"

"No," said Anne, looking away through the tender June greenness of the grand old trees. "I have not seen him for nearly a week."

"Not?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "Has he gone out of town, then?"

Anne shook her head.

"I don't know," she answered under her breath. "As I tell you, I haven't seen him for nearly a week."

"Oh — by Jove!" exclaimed Barney in a startled voice, not because of her words, but because of her tone.

There was a pause. Then Anne continued:

"We — our engagement is broken off."

"Broken off?" repeated Barney, looking bewildered. "And, in Heaven's name, why?"

The sun had gone behind a bank of hurrying clouds, and Anne shut up her sunshade and began to trace intricate diagrams with its point in the gravel at her feet.

"It was my fault," she said briefly.

"But — don't you care for him, then?" asked her companion, knitting his straight brows.

Anne looked at him silently; and the look was a very sufficient answer.

"You have had some misunderstanding, I suppose?" he said, when perhaps a minute had passed.

She smiled. But to Barney her smile appeared rather a heart-broken affair.

"Yes, I suppose we have — a permanent misunderstanding," she said drearily.

"If it was your fault," said her companion, after a moment or two's thought, "and if you are sorry about it — you look as if you were — why don't you tell him so?"

She shivered, then drew herself up rather proudly. "I couldn't do that," she answered, a chill creeping into her soft voice.

"I suppose I can't do anything?" suggested Barney, after another pause.

"Oh, no. No one can do anything."

Barney rubbed his chin meditatively.

"It's a pity," he said — "it's an awful pity. Old Brian has the devil's own temper when his back is put up — to use a homely and rather vulgar expression. But, as I happen to know, he's idiotically fond of you — at least, I mean he is most awfully in love with you — and I'm sure if you only made the very smallest overture of reconciliation, he would meet you halfway. After all, he's had a hard time, poor old chap, and you say it was your fault," concluded Barney, repeating himself flounderingly, as people have a way of doing in real dialogue.

"And suppose he didn't meet me halfway," replied Anne, with a somewhat hysterical laugh. "I should feel rather foolish, shouldn't I?"

"Oh well, of course, if you are going to bring pride and dignity and all the rest of it into the

question," said Barney, shrugging his shoulders, "matters are at a deadlock."

"Let us talk of something else," exclaimed Anne, moving her head impatiently.

"All right," agreed her companion in a placid tone. "What shall it be? The Budget? — the Labor Government? — *Dreadnoughts?* — aerial navigation? — and a score of other topics of the day? I am posted up in them all," he added modestly.

"Oh, I don't want to talk," she said in a tired voice.

"Very well; I don't mind. Only you said we were to change the conversation," remonstrated Musgrave. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Not in the least."

Barney lit up, then said:

"I hope you remember that you are to tell me when you have had enough of me."

"Yes," she answered absently.

Five silent minutes passed. If Barney had been in the least degree a conceited person, he might have felt hurt by the evident fact that Anne had wellnigh forgotten his existence. But he was not in the least conceited; and it concerned him very little what any woman thought of him. Ten years had passed since he had seen the end of the only love-affair he had ever had; and since then he had rather avoided women. But Anne's soft,

demure prettiness rather appealed to him. Besides, he had felt heartily glad that his old chum should have a chance of married happiness, in spite of the inexplicable trouble that seemed to have befallen him during the many months of Barney's absence, and Anne's announcement both startled and distressed him. Women were queer creatures, he reflected.

"Miss Stafford," he began suddenly, then stopped, feeling certain that he had, in all probability, better hold his tongue.

She started and dropped her book. He picked it up, and went on in a deliberate voice:

"I've known Brian Carroll since we were lads, and I've never known anything but good of him. What the upshot will be of this da —— I mean, this appalling piece of folly that he's got himself mixed up with, Heaven only knows. But I can see he's had the deuce of a hard time. And now, if you've cut him adrift — well, I shouldn't be surprised if he throws up the sponge altogether."

"What can I do?" she made answer. "If you know him so well, you know whether or not he is likely to be forgiving. Personally, I shouldn't think he is."

Her eyes were filled with unshed tears.

Barney stood up to go.

"Well, think it over," he said. "If a man's been living in the dark for an indefinite time, and

has a light unexpectedly given to him, he's apt to feel the darkness more if the light is suddenly and unexpectedly put out."

Which was a wonderful piece of imagery for practical Barney Musgrave.

Anne sat where he had left her for a long time, until the sun had gone down, and the air had become chilly. Then she gathered up her sunshade and her book, and walked slowly homeward.

Again she looked in vain for a note in the postbox. Again she dressed herself with care, and watched and listened until bed-time. And again disappointment was her portion.

Well, it was her own fault, you may say. Yes; but did the consciousness of being punished for our own faults ever lessen the punishment, do you think? I fancy not.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE afternoon a few days later Frances Charteris came in on her way to some smart afternoon reception.

Anne was busy cutting out a blouse, and Frances exclaimed:

"Good gracious, Anne! do you mean to say you make your own clothes? And yet you always look so nice. And do observe this thing I have on. I had the bill from Madame Worgle yesterday — twenty-eight guineas. Isn't it scandalous! Of course, I don't suppose I shall ever be able to pay for it. But did you ever see such a horrible fit? It's excruciatingly tight in the back, and absurdly wide across the front; and the sleeves only allow my arms to move an inch either way."

"It looks very nice," said Anne; "and it is awfully becoming. But I don't think it can be worth twenty-eight guineas. However, if you are not going to pay for it, of course it does not matter what your dressmaker charges."

"Dressmaker!" echoed Frances. "Worgle would have a fit if you called her anything so

ordinary. She always alludes to herself as a modiste. This is a lovely stuff, Anne," she added, holding up Anne's work to the light. "Was it expensive?"

"I forget. I bought it months ago."

"Anne, you are not looking well. Your face is about half the size it was when I last saw you. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing. I'm all right," was the impatient answer.

For it is irritating to be told by our friends what our mirrors have unflatteringly impressed upon us morning and evening (and at odd times between) for more than a week.

"Well, don't be cross, dear. Eric told you, didn't he, that I called one day and found you were out?"

"Yes," Anne replied briefly.

Frances unbuttoned one glove and carefully buttoned it again before she said, with a nervous little laugh:

"I heard both from Elfie and Eric that you and the Unknown — I mean Mr. Carroll — are engaged. I'm sure, dear Anne, I hope with all my heart that it will turn out for the best. He may not be so bad as they say — one never can tell."

"What a characteristic congratulation!" returned Anne, as she began to pin two pieces of

a sleeve together. She had no intention of informing Frances of the downfall of her romance — at least, not in the meantime. With Musgrave it had somehow been different.

"I suppose it is quite true?" went on Frances hesitatingly.

"Well, I should hardly be likely to make such a statement unless I thought it was true," replied Anne, smiling in rather a wintry fashion, as she realized the Jesuitical nature of this answer.

Frances sighed.

"It does seem a pity," she said; "because really, with your looks, you could have done much better, if you'll forgive my saying so. Even Alfred thinks you are very nice-looking. Let me see — what *was* it Eric said about you the first time he saw you? That he couldn't see your eyes for your face, I think — but no, it couldn't have been that. Oh, I remember, that he couldn't see your face for your eyes — that was it. And you really have lovely eyes, Anne. And, of course, no one can say that Mr. Carroll isn't both good-looking and distinguished-looking as well. I should think you will have beautiful children. Don't you think so?"

Anne replied, truly enough, that she had not considered the matter.

"Well, I must go," said Frances, rising and trying to catch a glimpse of herself in the very

small old mirror over Anne's mantelpiece. "By the way, I forgot to tell you that Alfred knows a man — Lascelles, I think his name is — who knows Mr. Carroll, and he says it is absurd to think of his committing a crime of any kind, as he was always quite a different kind of person. But I suppose even superior people may give way to forgery as well as any other kind of temptation. And, after all, a forgery isn't as bad as a murder, is it?"

Anne did not answer this rambling speech. Some people said that one of Frances Charteris's charms was that she never expected an answer to anything she said.

"And when are you to be married, dear?" Frances went on, as she kissed Anne on both cheeks affectionately.

"I don't know," Anne replied, with a queer kind of ache in her heart as she thought how true this was.

"I should love to ask you and Mr. Carroll to dinner," continued Mrs. Charteris regretfully. "But you know what Alfred is. I suppose you wouldn't like me to ask you both one night when he is dining out?"

"No," said Anne, with a certain stiffening of her lips. "I don't think either Mr. Carroll or I would like that."

After Frances had gone, Anne flung her half-

made blouse into her work-basket with her scissors and cottons, and for perhaps an hour tried to write. But no ideas would come. Then, though it was only six o'clock, she made a light dinner of a couple of slices of bread-and-butter and a cup of milk, and went out for a long walk.

It was a lovely evening, warm and windless. And as Anne walked aimlessly on and on westward, a certain peace came to her, and for a time chased away her trouble. After all, she was young, she was healthy, and she had the world before her. Why should she grizzle and moan, and let her life be spoilt because, for the time, the "desire of her eyes" had been taken from her? Others had had to bear such losses. And why not she? And yet, even while she took herself to task thus, and braced herself for cheerful and Spartan endurance, she knew that her grief and depression were not killed, but only scotched, and that in the solitude of her flat, and especially during the long night hours when sleep would not come, they would rear their heads again as malignantly as ever. And as she turned her face homeward in the gathering dusk, her heart sank, and her newly-won peace of mind left her.

As she got out of the lift she felt deadly tired. For she had walked fast and far, and she had eaten very little all day. The corridor leading to her door was as yet unlit, and she was half-way

along it when she saw that a man's figure was coming slowly towards her.

For a moment she felt faint and sick, for she knew that it must be Carroll. Would he walk past her without speaking? she wondered wretchedly. Or — had he at last been unable to resist the longing to see her, and been at her door? She could almost hear the beating of her heart.

But it was not Carroll's voice that came to her through the dusk. It was Musgrave's.

"Is that you, Miss Stafford?" he said, as he came nearer. "Ah yes, I see it is. I have been vainly trying for admittance first to Carroll's flat and then yours, and was just coming away in despair. Are you going to be very busy? And if you are not, may I come and talk to you on the chance of finding Carroll later?"

"Yes, do," she said, though not very cordially. For, as a matter of fact, she would rather have been alone.

"I have been for a long walk," she said, when she had lit the lamp, drawn down the blinds, and thrown her hat and coat on a chair.

As the lamp-light fell on her face, Musgrave reluctantly confessed to himself that he had rather overrated her claims to beauty. She had fine eyes and hair, to be sure. But, in spite of them, to-night she looked absolutely plain.

"You had just accomplished a long walk last time I saw you," he said, looking at her with a quizzical light in his clear blue eyes. "Are you training for a race?"

Then he added gravely:

"I think you walk too much. You look awfully tired."

"Well, I am deadly tired," she replied, leaning her head back against a yellow cushion and speaking in a dull, toneless voice that fully corroborated her words.

"Have you ——" began Barney.

"Don't ask me if I have seen Mr. Carroll," she interrupted him sharply, "because I haven't."

"Neither have I," he answered. "I wired to him the day before yesterday to dine with me at the Travellers, but he wired back that he was too busy. So to-night, as I was at a loose end, I taxi-cabbed over. I suppose he'll be in soon," he added, looking at his watch. "But I shall only wait a quarter of an hour longer, because I think you ought to get to bed and have a good sleep. And if I were you, I shouldn't go in for so much pedestrian exercise. It's rather taking it out of you, you know."

Just then Anne started and leaned forward, her color changing from white to red, and then back to white again.

For the front-door had opened and shut quietly,

and a man's firm footstep sounded in the little hall. The next moment Carroll came into the room.

He did not see Barney at first, for the lamp wanted oil, and was burning rather low.

As Anne rose to her feet, he took her hands in his and said, with a remorseful tenderness of face and voice:

"Anne — we have both found out, I think, that we can't very well do without one another."

Then, as he turned to draw her towards the light, his eyes met Barney's, and both remorse and tenderness left his face, to be succeeded by a strange stillness.

He dropped Anne's hands, and said in a formal, expressionless tone that she hardly recognized as his:

"How do you do, Musgrave? No, don't go. I have an appointment, and only came in for a few minutes."

As he spoke Anne saw, though Barney did not, that he laid her latchkey on the table behind her work-basket. To her it seemed like a silent repudiation of their brief love-story. He did not look at her, or her face of white, mute dismay might have touched him.

Barney glanced from one to the other in perplexity and annoyance. He saw, of course, that Carroll was furious at finding him thus *tête-à-tête*

with Anne, but he could not for the life of him think what would be best to say or do. Why on earth should he have happened to come to Colecourt Mansions to-night, of all nights, thus frustrating the very thing he wished to bring about? he asked himself irritably.

There are some situations which seem expressly arranged by the "gods of mischance" to tangle inextricably the affairs of human beings — situations which are only complicated by the most scrupulously accurate explanations. Surely this was one.

"I've been storming your flat for at least half an hour, Brian," began Barney, in the hurriedly conciliatory tone of the male would-be peacemaker. "And at last I begged Miss Stafford to take pity on me until you got back. I was just going, however ——"

He stopped short. For Carroll, with a bow that included both, had walked quietly to the door, and almost before Anne quite realized that he had been in the room, he had gone.

As the door of the flat closed behind him, Barney exclaimed savagely:

"Of all the infernally unlucky things! I'm most awfully sorry, Miss Stafford, but ——"

Anne interrupted him. She felt furious — furious with Carroll, with Barney, with herself, with the diabolical contrariness of things in gen-

eral. But she did not feel inclined to give herself away more than she had already done.

"There is no necessity for your being sorry," she said lightly. "If Mr. Carroll had an appointment, we must not expect that even our united attractions would induce him to give it up. Don't go — unless you must. I am going to make some coffee. Won't you stay and share it with me?"

"But — if Brian comes back, he will want to see you alone," hesitated Barney.

"He will not come back," said Anne, with a brief smile. "And if he did — this is my flat. I entertain what visitors I choose."

Barney marvelled at the ways of women, but helped his hostess to make the coffee without further comment.

Carroll, whose appointment was apparently to bang himself into his flat, and make use of some fairly strong language regarding Mr. Musgrave, was feeling more upset and what he would have called "raked up" than he had done for many a long day.

He had felt his estrangement from Anne quite as much as she had, perhaps more. And day after day, evening after evening, he had resisted the almost ungovernable impulse to go to her and insist upon a reconciliation.

To-night it had proved too strong for him. He

missed her; he wanted her. He could not do without her any longer.

I think he had divined, during these weary days, that she had been longing for him as he had been for her. He had grown to know her so well in these months of intimate companionship.

He told himself that he had been hasty and impatient with her, that perhaps it was only natural that she should want to know all that concerned him — the man she was going to marry.

He had pictured her — pretty accurately, as it happened — waiting and listening for him; her dear little face growing more and more wistful as the days went on. And he had at last resolved to stifle his pride and give in. He thought he knew how her lovely eyes would light up when she saw him, how she would let him gather her in his arms and tell her everything, and insist that their marriage should be at once.

So that it was something of a shock to be flung back upon himself, as it were, by the sight of her sitting cosily in the lamp-light by the side of his old friend Musgrave.

It had never occurred to him to be jealous of Barney — easy-going Barney, who seldom looked twice at a woman, and had rarely a good word to say of any of the sex, since his own unfortunate affair in the far-away years. Nevertheless, Carroll remembered now, with a fierce, impotent

rage, that from the first he had seemed to admire Anne.

As he paced up and down his sitting-room, half beside himself with fury and misery, the door-bell whirred sharply.

Carroll opened the door to admit no less a person than Barney himself, looking perplexed and worried.

After a brief silence the latter said, in his good-natured, languid voice:

"I say, old chap, I hope you didn't in any way misunderstand my being in Miss Stafford's flat to-night? I can assure you——"

"Why should I misunderstand?" returned Carroll quietly. "Why should you not call upon Miss Stafford if you, and she, wish it? I have no right to choose her visitors, even if she were still engaged to me, which, as she has doubtless told you, she is not."

"Well, there's no earthly reason why she shouldn't be," was the blunt answer. "The girl is most awfully fond of you, as anyone can see — and, of course, she's naturally nervous about making any advances or that — any girl would be."

"She has been taking you into her confidence, then?" inquired Carroll in a chilly voice. "You have made good use of your time, by Jove! So far as I remember, you have only seen her two or three times."

"Now don't get nasty, Brian. If you've any idea of being jealous of me, you can get rid of it once and for all. You know very well I'm no squire of dames. But I like the little woman, and you and I are old chums, and you both suit each other down to the ground. So why not make it up, and have done with it?"

Carroll vouchsafed no answer, and the other went on:

"It was a piece of the devil's own mischief that I should have been there to-night at all. I need hardly tell you I never went before. I came up to see you, and when I had knocked for some time I was just going away, when Miss Stafford came along the corridor, and I — well, I asked her if I might sit and talk with her until you came back."

"I quite understand," Carroll answered in a curiously detached voice. "If you remember, you explained the matter to me about half an hour ago — more or less. You seem to think that I am aggrieved by your sudden friendship with Miss Stafford. On the contrary, I wish you all success."

"What do you mean?" asked Barney sharply.

"Just what I say. You can offer her what I cannot — a clean record and an honorable name ——"

"Oh, don't talk such rot!" interrupted the

other, with an angry laugh. "Good God, man, I don't want to marry her or make love to her. I only think she's a sweet, wholesome, nice little woman that any man might be proud to have for a friend. And, by Jove! Carroll, I think you're treating her damned badly."

"I refuse to discuss her with you any further," said Carroll, with a queer flash in his eyes. "If she has told you I have treated her with any want of consideration — if she thinks I have done so — I am very sorry. I don't particularly want to quarrel with you, Barney, but — well, we'll drop the subject, if you please."

"Oh, all right," replied the other, somewhat huffily.

The sound of the door-bell jarred through the brief silence that followed.

"Oh, damn that bell!" muttered Carroll as he went to open the door.

A messenger-boy stood on the mat. He handed Carroll a note, saying he was to wait for an answer.

Carroll came back into the sitting-room a moment or two later with a white, set face and a dazed look of trouble in his eyes.

"My mother is dying," he said huskily. "She has sent for me; she wants me to go at once."

"Dying! Good God!" ejaculated Barney in

genuine sympathy. "What is it? Has there been an accident, or what?"

"I don't know," was the brief answer.

A few moments later both men, their late imminent quarrel forgotten, were speeding on their way to Eaton Place.

As for Anne, she sat for hours after Barney had left her, feeling numbed and helpless. When she thought of the many days and evenings when she had watched and listened for Carroll's coming, only to be disappointed, the fact that he had come to-night of all nights seemed a fiendishly and inconceivably cruel freak of Fate. If only she had been alone — as she had been all these other evenings! Why should things happen so? she wondered miserably. She still seemed to hear his voice — the voice that had become so dear to her: "Anne — we have both found out, I think, that we can't very well do without one another." She seemed to see the tender love-light in his eyes die out suddenly, and change to cold anger and distrust. Why should Barney Musgrave have chosen to come to-night, of all nights? Or why should Brian have chosen this special night to hold out the olive-branch?

She stamped her foot at the senseless contrariness of things.

Then she pulled herself together, and again

took herself severely to task, as she had done in the earlier part of the evening.

After all, she was not responsible for this wretched tangle. So why need she fret or reproach herself?

She allowed that perhaps, primarily, she ought not to have questioned her lover on the one subject regarding which he was obstinately uncommunicative — a subject, too, which she herself had declared she would leave unquestioned.

Well, that was over and done with. He had resented it, and showed that he had. And she had lost her temper, and said what she had certainly never meant to say. Yes, it was over and done with. Everything was over and done with, she thought somewhat drearily.

"However, thank God I have my work," she said half-aloud, "and my name to make in the world. Love isn't everything."

No, poor, plucky, wayward Anne, it is not everything. But it is a good deal.

CHAPTER XIX

"Is that you, Brian?" said a woman's querulous voice.

"Yes, mother."

"Have they told you that — I am dying?"

He bent his head.

"Tell the nurse to go," went on his mother irritably. "I want — to speak to you — alone."

Carroll made a brief sign to the nurse, who rose and went softly out of the room.

"Is the door shut?" asked Lady Carroll, with a feeble movement of her head. "Are we alone?"

"Yes," Brian answered, "we are quite alone."

As he spoke he drew a chair to the side of the bed, and took his mother's hand in his. But she pulled it away fretfully.

"Is the dressing-room door shut too?"

"Yes. You wanted to see me, mother?" her son answered, his deep voice not quite steady. "You sent for me?"

"Yes — I sent for you. They tell me I am dying. There was some accident — the motor — I forget. Brian — am I very much disfigured?"

He hesitated; then said in a low voice:

"The room is very dark — I can hardly see ——"

"I understand," she interrupted him, with rather a dreadful attempt to smile. "You never were good at pretty lies, Brian. However, it doesn't matter — for an hour or two. And as I have so little time, I must say quickly — what I sent for you to say."

She paused for a moment; then went on, laying a small white hand on his wrist:

"You will still keep our — secret? I mean, after I — die? You won't give my poor Felix away to his father — to the world?"

A curious pallor overspread the face of the man who listened. His voice was strained and rather hoarse as he answered:

"Mother — won't you give me back my promise? At least let me clear myself to the dear old dad."

Her tiny fingers closed on his wrist with a grip that seemed like steel.

"I won't give you back your promise," she gasped in a fierce whisper. "You know very well what it will mean for Felix if you tell his father. Ah, Brian" — and her voice changed and became wonderfully sweet and pleading — "as a boy you used to say you adored me, and since you grew up you have always been a good, de-

voted son, Brian. And now — when I am dying — you won't refuse the one thing I ask? I know you will keep your word if you promise."

She stopped again, then murmured:

"You know, dear — everyone thinks that — that you did it. Why undeceive them — now?"

"Why indeed!" was the somewhat bitter answer.

"Then — you will keep silence — still? For my sake, Brian. For the sake of — the pretty little mother you used to say you were so proud of. Promise."

"I promise," he answered briefly.

"You — you won't fail me?"

"Have I ever failed you, mother?"

"No, no — never. Now — call nurse. I am faint ——"

Her voice died away in a trailing whisper. Brian hastily summoned the nurse, and went slowly downstairs.

As he passed the door of the library it opened, and his father came out.

"Come in here, my lad," the tall old man said, with a queer break in his strong voice.

Brian followed him into the dull, heavily-furnished room. It held rather cruel memories for him. In was in this room that his father had told him he was a disgrace to the old name of Carroll,

and had said a few other things rather difficult to forget or forgive.

Sir John closed the door, and motioned his son to a chair. But Brian remained standing.

"My boy," said his father, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "I have to ask your forgiveness. I have misjudged you — cruelly."

But Brian's face did not soften.

"I don't understand," he answered coldly.

Sir John walked once the length of the room and back again. Then he said in a husky voice:

"I heard what passed between you and your mother. I was in the dressing-room, and as I opened the door I heard her ask you not to 'give Felix away to his father,' and I considered it my right to hear the rest. Oh, my son — my favorite son — it has gone hard with me all these weary months to believe you guilty. And again — I ask you to forgive me."

Brian still gazed stonily in front of him.

"My boy," said Sir John in a shaking voice — "I am an old man."

A sudden quiver seemed to pass over Brian's dark face. Then he said simply:

"I'm glad you know, dad. Because — I couldn't have told you."

His father busied himself nervously with the lamp. Brian walked over to the hearthrug, and stood with his back to the empty fireplace.

"Your poor mother was always a slave to Felix," the elder man said, with a heavy sigh. "He's a bad lot, Felix — though he is my son. I've found out one or two things lately — however, we needn't speak of that now. Oh, Brian, my lad, I thank God I know the truth. It has been a bitter trial to me to think of you — as I did. I was an old fool not to guess. And you, sir," he added fiercely, "were a young fool to saddle yourself with other people's crimes. Damn it! couldn't you trust your own father?"

Brian was silent.

"Ah, well," went on Sir John sadly, "I know you did it for your poor mother's sake. Your poor mother ——"

He broke off suddenly; then added in a stifled voice, as he held out his hand:

"But you'll forgive her, Brian. You'll forgive us both. You've been used rather hardly — among us all."

Brian could not bear to see the wistful, almost appealing look in the stern old eyes. He crossed the room to where his father stood, and took the outstretched hand.

"It's all right, governor," he said. "Let's forget about it. I'd have done a good deal more than that for the mother."

His voice shook a little, and he sat down at the table and covered his eyes with his hands.

A couple of hours later his mother died, dreamily content in the knowledge that Brian would keep her secret faithfully to the end.

On the afternoon of the day of the funeral Sir John had a long interview with his younger son.

"And so, you contemptible young scoundrel," the old man said, in biting, incisive tones, when the interview was nearly over, "you shall receive the allowance I have named every quarter regularly as long as you remain out of England. After my death it will cease. And never let me see your face again. You are worse than a criminal. You are a cur. You knew your brother would shield you for your mother's sake," he added scathingly, "and you held your cowardly tongue."

The young man addressed sat in sullen silence, tearing savagely at his finger-nails. There was a certain shadowy resemblance to Brian in his face and figure, but the mouth, eyes, and expression were totally different.

Suddenly he rose, with a look of absolute hatred in his shifty eyes. He had been drinking, as his father noted in angry disgust, and swayed slightly as he stood.

"And do you think I'm going to be exiled and treated like a dog because my brother Brian — damn him! — has trumped up some lie to save his own face and ruin me?" he shouted, banging

the table fiercely with his shut hand. "Why is his word to be taken before mine? Tell me that. I say I'm innocent — and I say he's a liar."

Sir John held up a wrinkled white hand.

"Silence, sir," he said sharply. "Your brother Brian neither lied about you nor betrayed you. It was from your dead mother's lips that I heard of your crime. She had sent for Brian, to beg him, poor noble lad! to go on shielding you after her death indefinitely, and he promised. But I was present at that interview unknown to either. And I thank God that I was. Ay — you may cringe and look scared. Well you know I could put you in the dock, you hound — if it were not for the old name. Now — get out of my sight. It makes me sick to look at you."

"Oh, all right, I'm going. You always hated me, you know, governor — even when I was a kid. If you'd taken a little more trouble to hide it, it might have made some difference. However, I'm off. So you and your returned prodigal can have the place to yourselves. Brian's not such a saint, you know. He's got into some scrape with a woman — has her hidden away somewhere, I've heard — the usual game. I'm not sure but she's married ——"

But his father interrupted him.

"What I want to know of your brother's affairs I can hear from himself," he said sternly.

"Blackening his name won't clear yours. Again — I have the honor to wish you good-afternoon, sir."

The young man, with a savage laugh, flung himself out of the room, and a little later out of the house.

After dinner that night, as Brian and his father sat in the library in the intimate silence that reminded each of old times, Sir John said abruptly:

"Brian — I have something to ask you. I don't want to force your confidence, mind. But — well, this worries me somehow. I've heard — never mind how — that you are in some scrape with a woman. No, no — don't tell me if you don't want to. But I can't help thinking that — it seems unlike you."

Brian struck a match and lit another cigarette before he answered quietly:

"I don't know who your informant may be. But he — or she — has got hold of the wrong end of the story."

"There is a story, then?" demanded the old man, with a heavy frown.

Brian turned in his chair, and looked at his father with an affectionately whimsical expression in the dark eyes that were so like, and yet so unlike, his mother's.

"There is a brief story — yes," he admitted.

Then his face changed, and he moved impatiently.

"Well? — well?" said Sir John, drumming irritably on the arm of his chair.

"Well," his son answered, "there's nothing to weave a mystery out of, dad. It is only that I made the acquaintance of a young girl who — though she knew of what I was accused — believed in me. We became friends, and a little later we found out that we cared for each other. I had the feeling that I had no right to tell her I cared about her, or to ask her to marry me ——"

"Why not?" interrupted his father. "Why not — eh? Ah yes, I see — you needn't explain. Damn that brother of yours! Well — go on."

"Well — that's all," said Brian, pitching his cigarette into the fire. "At least, very nearly. We were to be married in October. But we had a quarrel — a misunderstanding ——"

He broke off suddenly, and began to walk restlessly up and down the room.

His father watched him for a few seconds from under his down-drawn, heavy white eyebrows, then said abruptly:

"I suppose — I hope — I mean, of course, this girl is a — a lady?"

Brian's face assumed an expression of haughty surprise.

"My dear father, you must have misunder-

stood me," he answered stiffly. "I asked her to marry me."

"Oh, well, don't lose your temper," said the old gentleman, with a grim smile. "Men have been known to marry beneath them before your day, or mine either. However, you haven't told me what the quarrel was about."

"No, sir. I have no intention of telling you."

"Oh, the deuce you haven't! Keep it to yourself, then. And what is this paragon's name, pray?"

"Stafford — Anne Stafford."

"Humph. One of the Lincolnshire Staffords?"

"I've no idea," was the brief answer.

"Pretty?" continued Sir John.

"Yes."

"And if she believed you were innocent, didn't she want to know how you got into such an infernal scrape, and why?"

"Naturally."

"She guessed you were shielding someone else — eh?"

"She hinted as much," Brian answered gloomily, as he thought of that sunny day in the Zoo and its sequel.

"I thought so. And you wouldn't tell her, quixotic young ass! And she resented it, and that was what the quarrel was about, I suppose?"

"Something of that kind," Brian assented absently.

For his thoughts had now travelled to Colecourt Mansions.

His father looked at him for perhaps half a minute in silence. Then he said:

"You're a queer, close young devil, Brian. But I understand — in a way. I must see this Anne Stafford. You shall take me to see her — eh?"

"I'll take you with pleasure," replied Brian, with a short laugh — "when I go myself. At present we are hardly on visiting terms."

"Pooh, pooh — nonsense! What does a lover's quarrel signify? If the girl is fond of you — and I suppose she is, or she wouldn't have stuck to you in spite of everything — no doubt she's fretting her heart out. I know something of women. You go and see her — take her in your arms and kiss her, and tell her you've been a brute and a fool, and any other names you think suitable. She'll come round. Bless my soul — eleven o'clock. And I have one or two letters to write. By the way, Brian, of course you'll take up your quarters here as before?"

"Well, I don't know. You see, I have taken the flat."

"The flat? Oh, damn the flat! Shut it up. Let it. What does it matter? Remember, you

are my eldest son — my only son, to all intents and purposes. I'm not going to live here all alone. And by-and-by marry this little girl of yours — this Anne Stafford, and let me see a few of my grandchildren before I die."

CHAPTER XX

THERE is a certain small and quiet public garden in London which is comparatively little known, though it is hardly a stone's-throw from the west end of Oxford Street, and close to a well-known, fashionable square. It is reached by two flights of some fifteen or twenty steps, and has some of the advantages of a roof-garden.

Here Anne directed her steps one hot afternoon in early August. She took her notebook and pencil, in the hope that some ideas might occur to her worthy of being jotted down. She had been writing all the morning, and her head and hand felt tired.

She seated herself on a shady bench facing eastward, and leaned her head against the stone coping with a sigh of weariness. She looked pale and fagged, and her eyes had lost the joyous, child-like expression that had characterized them only a few weeks ago.

Presently she took a letter from her pocket, and read it over carefully. Its edges were a little frayed, as though with much previous reading. It was dated from Eaton Place, and ran thus:

"May I come to see you, Anne? And shall we forgive one another? The cloud has lifted — and I am free. I have been a jealous, insensate ass, or I should have written before now. But perhaps you understand.

"BRIAN."

Anne refolded the letter slowly, and fitted it carefully into its envelope. The date was three days ago, and it was still unanswered. This fact gave her a certain satisfaction. She supposed that he expected it would be answered by return of post. But she remembered, resentfully, all her weary days of vain watching and waiting. And, with the perverse cruelty practised by some otherwise loving and gentle women, she hugged the thought that very possibly her lover was feeling rather unhappy.

The little garden was very still and peaceful. The water of the quaintly-fashioned fountain plashed dreamily. The shrubs and plants in the sturdy tubs placed here and there on the neat square red tiles looked healthy and cheerful. The place was almost deserted, save for two shy little children who wandered hither and thither in pursuit of a lazy white butterfly, and a slight, shabbily-dressed young man, evidently a foreigner, who sat half-asleep in the sun at the other end of the garden.

Anne began to feel drowsy too. Five minutes or so later she opened her eyes with a start at the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Are you surprised to see me?" Carroll asked quietly, as he seated himself beside her without other greeting.

For a moment or two Anne did not speak, for her heart was beating uncomfortably fast. Then she said in a carefully modulated voice:

"Did you know I was here? Or have you only come by chance?"

"I saw you crossing Grosvenor Square," he said, with a queer little smile, "and I followed you. Did you not get my letter, Anne?"

"Yes," she answered.

"And had you any special reason for not answering it?" he continued.

"I meant to answer it — later," she replied.

"How much later, Anne? This year? Next year? And would next year have dissolved into sometime — and sometime into never?"

"It was rather a difficult letter to answer," said Anne, after a pause.

"Surely not. One word would have been enough."

"Yes. But I had to decide what word."

"Anne — what has come to you?" he said in an anxious voice, as he bent to look into her

averted face. "Have I alienated your love altogether?"

"I don't know," was the unexpected answer. "I suppose you have."

Carroll was conscious of a distinct shock.

"Do you mean," he said in slow, hurt tones, "that you never really cared?"

"Oh yes, I cared."

"But now," he went on bitterly, "you have got over it?"

"Have I? Well — yes, I dare say you are right. I suppose I have got over it."

"I don't believe it," he said, taking one of her hands in his. "You are ill and run down, and you don't know what you feel and don't feel. Do you know how wan and fragile you are looking? Or is it your black dress? Are you in mourning?"

"Yes. I am in mourning for the old Anne Stafford — the happy, light-hearted Anne — the Anne you killed."

"Don't talk so foolishly," he said tenderly. "I know I have been a jealous brute, and to blame in many ways. I own up. But it is all past now. I am no longer a man under a cloud."

"I know," she answered. "Mr. Musgrave told me. I know that for your mother's sake you took the blame of what your brother had done. It was very noble of you, I suppose. But

you might just as well have told me. It would have made all — the difference."

There was a silence.

Then Carroll said, with a distinct change of tone:

"Do you see much of Musgrave?"

"No," she answered in a tired voice. "I have not seen him since the last time I saw you — until the day before yesterday. I met him in the Strand."

"Where is the ring I gave you?" he asked abruptly — "the circle of sapphires that you said you would wear always?"

"I have it still," she said, a pink flush creeping into her cheeks. "It is too large — it kept slipping off. I suppose I ought to give it back to you?"

"I think so. I should like to put it on again myself. I know you are wearing it hung round your neck, Anne."

The flush on her cheeks grew deeper,. then faded.

He looked at her with grave, almost pitying eyes.

"You are not so pretty as you were," he said deliberately. "Do you know that?"

She did not speak, but her lashes grew heavy with unshed tears.

"But," he added, "to me you are infinitely

more charming — infinitely more sweet. And I love you a thousand times more than I did on the day you promised to marry me. When are you going to redeem that promise, Anne?"

"I shall never marry you now," she said listlessly.

"Never, Anne? And yet you love me, you foolish little girl?"

"No, not now. I did love you. But I don't now. I can't help it, Brian. Please don't speak about it any more."

He looked at her, and he knew as he looked that he should have to win her love all over again.

Somehow he understood her present half-resentful, half-apathetic mood — understood it as few men would have done. And he resolved to be patient, and regain, inch by inch, the ground he had lost.

"At least we can be friends," he said, after a silence. "It will be better than nothing. You are not going to refuse me even friendship, Anne, are you?"

"Oh no. But I have less time than I used to have."

Upon this statement Carroll made no comment. Presently Anne said hurriedly:

"You must have thought me very unkind — I mean, discourteous. Mr. Musgrave told me of

your mother's death. It must have been a great blow to you."

"Yes," he answered briefly.

"I suppose," she went on, without looking at him, "that you will give up your flat now. Your father will naturally want you to be with him."

"I have not made any plans yet," he said. "I may go to India with Musgrave."

"To India?" she echoed. "But why?"

He moved his shoulders slightly.

"My dear Anne, why does one go anywhere? I had other plans, I admit. I had planned to marry and settle down. But the Fates — and you — have arranged differently. However, that subject is tabooed. Henceforward we are to be good friends merely. And we will banish all romance. What are you busy with now, by the way? I have seen one story of yours in one of the magazines."

Anne looked idly at the notebook and pencil that lay on her lap.

"I am going to write an article on the City on a Sunday night," she answered. "I went once on the top of an omnibus as far as Gracechurch Street. It was really rather interesting and picturesque. After I got down from the omnibus, I walked about all the narrow streets and lanes that on week-days are so dangerous to cross. It felt like a city of the dead. And every now and then

one came upon a queer old church, set round with old trees, and the light from the electric lamps fell upon them and made their green leaves look so vivid and yet so unreal. And everything was so still. It gave me a feeling of enchantment."

"Let us go one night," suggested Carroll. "I'll come for you, and we'll dine somewhere, and then set out on our travels. It will be like an Arabian Night's entertainment — and will remind us of old times."

But Anne shrank back into the shell of reserve from which she had momentarily emerged.

"I don't know. I can't promise," she said, somewhat distantly. "I may not have time."

Much as he loved her, Carroll longed to shake her; but he only said, with a quiet smile:

"All right. I thought it might be a change for you."

Here the custodian — a former Horse Artilleryman — approached them, intimating respectfully that it was sundown, and time for the gardens to close.

"May I see you home?" Carroll said, as they went down the steps. "I have one or two things I want to get from my flat."

Anne smiled slightly.

"As we are both going the same way, there is no reason why we should not go together," she answered.

"Do you know, I am beginning to have a queer sort of idea that I have only known you for a few hours," he said, as they crossed Grosvenor Square. "Are you really the Anne Stafford I once knew? — or are you only someone with a ghostly likeness to her?"

"I don't think I am quite the Anne Stafford you knew," she said. "She was a rather foolishly sentimental person. I don't think you will see much more of her."

"I am sorry for that," her companion answered. "I am beginning to miss her a good deal."

"One often misses things a good deal when one finds one can no longer have them," said Anne quietly.

"What a vixen you could be!" observed Carroll, with a short laugh.

"Yes, so I have been told. You have had rather a lucky escape, all things considered."

"I don't feel at all as if I had escaped. The cords you once bound me with are stronger than ever."

"I should break them, then — if I were you."

"It's no use. I can't. I tell you honestly that I have tried," he said, as he caught her away from a passing motor.

"I am tired," said Anne suddenly. "When

we come out into Park Lane I shall take an omnibus."

"I am tired, too," replied Carroll. "Here is a cab. Let us take it."

"No — I'd rather go in an omnibus," Anne said decidedly.

But Carroll had already beckoned to the driver of a passing taxi, and Anne rather unwillingly allowed herself to be helped in.

"Do you remember the last time we were in a taxi together?" said Carroll. "Oh, Anne, it seems a weary while since then."

"Yes — I remember. It does seem a long time ago."

"I wonder which of us was to blame?" he went on, taking her hand in his. "Perhaps we both were. But remember, I will never give you up, Anne. I mean to marry you one day — and I will."

There was a somewhat lengthy silence. Then Anne said:

"Where is your brother — the brother you sacrificed so much for?"

"He has gone to Pernambuco. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am conscious of a dull kind of hatred towards him. I can't help thinking of what he has made you suffer."

"My dear Anne, you are morbid just now —

and you exaggerate things," he answered briefly. Then he added: "My father is awfully anxious to know you. May I bring him to see you one day?"

"Why should he want to know me?" she asked half-resentfully. "You must have told him about me."

"It is possible I may have spoken of you," he admitted. "Would that be accounted a crime to me?"

"I hope," said Anne, "that you did not tell him that — that ——"

She paused, but Carroll did not help her.

"I mean," she resumed, "I hope you did not tell him that we — that I — that you ——"

"I told him that I had asked you to marry me," he said quietly. "And that for a time we had been engaged. I also gave him to understand that — in fact, that we were no longer engaged."

Here the cab stopped at Colecourt Mansions. And this time Anne waited, quietly enough, while Carroll paid the driver and joined her in the vestibule.

"Do you remember the last time we came here in a cab together?" he said, as they went upstairs instead of waiting for the lift. "How you flew up to your flat in a fury, and shut the door in my face — figuratively speaking. And a little

later you put the latchkey in my letter-box and knocked like an infuriated postman. I was very angry, Anne. And yet I could not help laughing."

Anne's face dimpled a little, almost as it used to do.

"It was very silly and childish of me," she said, a faint color coming into her cheeks.

"Yes," he agreed. "But then, you are often silly and childish."

They parted on Anne's doormat. She did not ask him to go in.

CHAPTER XXI

CARROLL let himself into the flat that had been his home for so many months. It looked rather dismal; but in its owner's eyes it was glorified by the remembrance that, for a day, Anne had been the presiding goddess there.

He looked out one or two books, tied them together with string, and prepared to depart. Just then the postman knocked, and two letters dropped into the post-box. One of them was from an editor to whom he had spoken of Anne's work many weeks ago.

He looked at his watch. It was only a quarter past nine — not too late to go in and show her the letter. It would please her, he knew.

His first summons at the opposite door was unanswered. He rang again, and after a brief delay Anne appeared, clad in a rather shabby old dressing-gown, and with her hair falling over her shoulders. She did not look specially glad to see him, he noticed.

"Were you going to bed?" he said, his face betraying some disappointment. "It is not much past nine."

"I was washing my hair," she replied. "At least, I was drying it. What do you want? I know that sounds rude," she added, with a little laugh. "But is it something you forgot to say when we said good-by about two hours ago?"

"I wanted to show you a letter," he answered. "It contains something that concerns you. But I suppose I mustn't come in."

"Something that concerns me?" she said, looking surprised and interested. "Yes, you can come in if you like. I don't mind. This isn't a very presentable old dressing-gown; but you have seen it before."

So Carroll crossed once more the threshold he had crossed in such bitter anger nearly two months ago.

He seated himself in the chair Anne used to call his — it still stood in its old place at the left-hand side of the stove, he noted — and Anne resumed her seat on a little footstool on the hearthrug, and calmly went on drying the ends of her hair with a soft towel, while Carroll read the letter aloud.

Perhaps if her hair had not been so long and so thick and so wavy, and if she had not known how very pretty she looked with it down, she might have denied her former lover admittance. Who knows?

The letter suggested that Anne should write a series of short sketches for a magazine, of which the name is immaterial, at the rate of two guineas per thousand words.

"I think you ought to accept," said Carroll thoughtfully. "It's a better offer than the last. And the magazine has a very wide circulation. You find it pretty well everywhere. I myself have seen it in Alaska."

"But, of course, I shall accept!" exclaimed Anne, letting the towel fall into her lap. Then she added: "Of course, I know it is owing to you that the editor has made this offer."

"No — not entirely. Anne — what beautiful hair you have!"

"I think it is rather nice," she answered contentedly.

"You look almost like a child," he went on. "It's a pity you can't always wear it like that."

She laughed — almost as the old Anne used to laugh.

"I should look rather like a Crazy Jane, I'm afraid," she said. "You wouldn't like to walk in the park with me, I'm sure."

"By the way, when shall we make that Sunday-night expedition into the City?" he said.

Anne pulled her hair over her face.

"Whenever you like," she said. "As you say, it will remind us of old times."

"Then, suppose we say next Sunday. Are you disengaged then?"

"Yes. I don't live in a whirl of engagements."

"Well, let us arrange for next Sunday," he said. "I suppose I ought to go now?" he added regretfully, as he stood up.

"It is nearly ten o'clock," she answered.

"What a prim, matter-of-fact little Anne you have become!" he said, looking down at her with a good deal of feeling in his handsome eyes. "It is a pity we quarrelled that day — is it not? If we hadn't — we should be within six weeks or so of our wedding-day."

"I don't want you to remind me that I was once engaged to you," she answered quickly. "If you speak of it again, I — we can't be friends."

She could hardly have told what impelled her to make this rather absurd speech. In some mysterious way it soothed her pride — so she told herself afterwards.

"Very well — as you like," he said, in rather a hurt tone. "I couldn't have believed that you would have been so unforgiving."

"I am not unforgiving. Only I want to forget about everything, and begin all over again. Let us pretend that we only met a fortnight ago."

"What do you do to your hair to make it

wave like that, Anne?" he asked somewhat irrelevantly.

"Don't you remember," Anne said in answer, "what Elfie once said when someone asked her if she put her hair in curl-papers?"

"No."

"She said: 'No — God curled it when I was a baby, and it stayed like that.' I thought it such a pretty idea."

"I dare say. But it doesn't explain about your hair."

"Why, of course, I don't do anything to it. I haven't time."

"It's lovely," said Carroll, touching the wave nearest him with gentle, reverent fingers. "Well, I must go. And I'll come for you on Sunday evening. And we will dine at a quiet little place I know of, and when it grows dusk, we will set out on our pilgrimage."

When he had gone, Anne sat for a long time thinking. She looked very different from the Anne who had faced her humdrum day that morning. A faint color was in her cheeks, and her eyes were shining. Her hair was nearly dry, and waved like the sands of the sea — the deep, soft, natural wave that no artificial "wavers" can ever produce.

She looked at herself dispassionately in the queer little mirror over the mantelpiece. Yes —

she was glad that Brian had seen her with her hair down. She really did look almost — nay, quite — her best. Her dressing-gown, to be sure, was shabby and old. But still, its faded, grayish-green shade was not unbecoming.

As we know, she had quite made up her mind that she would never marry Brian now. But — it was delicious to know that he still loved her — that he still wanted to marry her. He was coming to see her on Sunday. And perhaps — very likely — she would see him often. The old familiar friendship would be resumed. And no doubt he would come back to his flat again, and everything would be as it used to be.

Life again held rose-colored lights for our poor wayward Anne — to whom of late all things had seemed of a uniform gray. And only this morning life had looked so empty — so meaningless.

She stood at her window for quite five minutes that night when she had put out her candle, and her lips were parted in a happy smile.

"Thank God, I have my friend again," she murmured under her breath. But though her lips said "friend," her heart said "lover."

As for Carroll, he walked home to Eaton Place in a fever of unrest. He did not indulge in any self-deception about friendship. He was quite clear about the nature of his feeling for Anne, and it was not friendship at all. That is to say,

its basis was friendship and comradeship, or it would not have been the highest and most enduring kind of love. But passion was there too, and I am bound to say that to-night it was strong and insistent. He thought of her as a wife, not as a friend. He was her lover, not only her good comrade.

What did she mean by saying that she would never marry him? What answerless riddles women were! While he was shunned, suspected, friendless, she was willing to marry him and face the world with him. And now, when he could offer her a name as unstained as that of most men, she calmly announced that she did not want their brief engagement even to be alluded to.

Had she really ceased to love him, he wondered? Was there — and his blood ran fiercely — another man by any chance? Could it be Barney? But the next moment he banished that idea. He knew he could trust Barney. But what of Anne?

And then he remembered that it was not the tiff he and she had had on that far-away June afternoon that was the cause of their estrangement, but his savage fit of jealousy on the night he found Barney in her flat — sitting in his place, lying back in his chair, with the air of a frequent and welcome visitor. Carroll had been to blame,

of course, in giving Anne no time or opportunity for explanation. And then had come his mother's death, the reconciliation with his father, the departure of his brother to Pernambuco, and a host of other things. But the thought of Anne was always present with him. Every morning he sent his man to the flat for letters; and every morning knew a pang of disappointment that no little note was among them in Anne's characteristic writing.

And at last he had written the note that Anne read in Duke Street Gardens — the note that she had deliberately left unanswered.

Well — there was nothing for it now but patience.

Sunday came as usual, after what seemed to Carroll — and perhaps to Anne — an endless procession of other days.

Carroll arrived at the flat shortly before six, and found Anne standing and sealing the weekly letter to her brother Jim.

"Should you write to me every week if I were in Singapore?" asked Carroll.

"Very likely," she answered, as she nipped the warm sealing-wax into a point, and put it away in a drawer. "Especially if you wrote to me. It isn't time to start yet," she added, "is it?"

"Oh no. But I thought I had better come early, because — oh, well, because I wanted to."

"Do you mind waiting while I change my gown and put on my hat?" said Anne, as she put away her writing materials. "You will find matches and cigarettes on the mantelpiece."

"Thanks, I have cigarettes," he answered, as he struck a match. "Why do you want to change your gown? The one you have on looks all right."

"I shan't be many minutes," she said. "By the way, where is Boxer?"

"Off on his own somewhere. I haven't seen him since the morning."

Ten minutes later Anne came back into the room again, clad in a long-tailed, filmy black gown, and a broad black hat with a drooping feather. Her gloves were black too, of soft suède, and she wore no ornaments of any kind.

"Do I look nice?" she asked, raising her eyes gravely to his.

"Yes," he replied shortly. "You know you do."

They dined at a queer old-fashioned little place not very far from Knightsbridge. It was almost empty, and at the far end of the room there was a deep bay-window, which looked out on an irregularly paved court, where two crooked old trees swayed gently in the almost imperceptible breeze.

The tables were daintily arranged with flowers

and fruit and delicate Venetian glass. And the furniture was genuinely old. Carroll seemed well known to the gray-haired old waiter, who, as they entered, came forward and led the way to the far-away table.

Anne was rather touched by the discovery that Carroll had not only evidently ordered the dinner beforehand, but that he had ordered all the dishes that were her special favorites. And as her tastes were simple, the dinner was comparatively simple also.

As they waited for the coffee, Anne leaned her elbow on the sill of the open window, and craned her neck to look into the court below. A broken, moss-grown fountain occupied the centre of the court. But its waters only dropped intermittently, and its basin was choked with dead leaves.

"What a quaint little place!" she said. "One feels as though everything has gone back a couple of hundred years — except the cooking," she added, when the old waiter had set tiny cups of coffee before them, and glided away again.

"I don't know. I fancy they didn't do themselves so badly a few centuries ago," said Carroll. "By the way, did you notice the old chap who waited on us?"

"Yes," she answered; "I have been thinking what a refined and rather melancholy face he has."

"Thirty years ago," said Carroll, as he lit a cigarette, "that man had a comfortable income of two thousand a year. He was educated at Harrow, and took M. A. at Cambridge. Horse-racing, card-playing, and a few other amusements gradually absorbed his capital, and a day came when he found himself with only a few pounds in the world. His relations refused to help him, and he could find no work that he was capable of doing. So he drifted on, sometimes getting a temporary job — sometimes almost starving — until at last he came down to this."

"Poor old man!" said Anne compassionately. "What a sad, sad story! Is he married?"

"He was, but his wife died years ago. They had no children. He's rather an intellectual old chap. We have long discussions on various subjects when the place is empty, as it occasionally is. I often come here — do does Barney. Ponsonby — his name is Ponsonby — takes a keen interest in our travels, and nearly always has something to tell us about the places we've visited that we didn't know before. He has a very fair library, and spends what leisure he has in reading. He has a couple of top-rooms here, and one day he asked me if I would care to go up and see his collection of books. So I went, and I commented on a very lovely miniature that hung over the mantelpiece in one of the rooms. It had a quaint little oil-

lamp hung beneath it, and he told me the miniature was of his wife, and that he has never allowed the light of the lamp to go out for I forget how many years. I fancy he's a little mad. But there's no doubt that he's the wreck of a gentleman. He always refuses all tips, so Barney and I used to bring him books occasionally. I haven't been here for a long time till the other day."

"I like that idea of the perpetually-burning lamp," said Anne. "I read in some book lately of a Franciscan monastery somewhere in Italy where, in a small chapel, there hung a tiny lamp, said to have been lit hundreds of years ago by St. Francis d'Assisi. It had never once been allowed to die out, and the monks took it in turns to watch it day and night. It was shown to visitors as a great wonder. And one day, when the old monk in charge was showing some tourists over the chapel, one man, with a vulgar laugh and jest, leaned forward and blew it out. Can you imagine anyone doing a thing like that?"

"I can imagine anything — given the minimum of good taste and the maximum of vulgarity," Carroll answered slowly.

"Isn't it time to go now?" asked Anne presently. "The moon is lovely."

"There's plenty of time," he said. "But if you like we can make a start."

Anne noticed as they went out that he shook

hands cordially with the gray-haired waiter, and she was glad he did so. And with her most winning smile she did likewise.

Carroll insisted on taking a taxi to St. Paul's Churchyard instead of the more humble omnibus. And Anne thoroughly enjoyed the swift drive in the moonlight.

Arrived at St. Paul's, they got out and walked slowly eastward along Cannon Street, and so to Gracechurch Street, Mincing Lane, and Crutched Friars — all these usually busy thoroughfares lying empty and still in the moonlight, looking, as Anne had told Carroll, like streets in a city of the dead. They went wandering on, now turning into some lane as narrow as a foreign by-street, now crossing some small court, now pausing by one of those green oases of which there are so many hidden away in busy London.

At last they found themselves in the City Road, and loitered for ten minutes or so in the little flagged pathway that runs through Bunhill Fields. The moonlight fell on the old tombstones — tombstones that bore such names as John Bunyan, William Blake, Daniel Defoe, and Isaac Watts. And as they turned homeward, when they had left this old-world burial-ground nearly a mile behind them, they passed a small unpretentious-looking church, whence came the sound of exquisite organ music.

Anne stopped.

"Let us go in," she said. "It is a dear little church, and makes one feel so good."

Carroll acquiesced, as, indeed, he would have acquiesced to anything she had proposed in this their renewed friendship, and they entered the building together, and seated themselves in a pew near the door.

The music had ceased, and the clergyman was offering up a prayer. And somehow the prayer lingered in the minds of both Anne and Carroll, and in some undefinable way seemed to bring them nearer to one another in spirit. And after the prayer came a short hymn, of which the words were familiar to both. They were set to a wild minor air that was curiously fascinating.

"If any little word of mine
May make a life the brighter,
If any little song of mine
May make a heart the lighter,
God, help me speak the little word,
And take my bit of singing,
And drop it in some lonely vale,
To set the echoes ringing.

"If any little love of mine
May make a life the sweeter,
If any little grief of mine
May make a friend's the fleeter,
If any lift of mine may ease
The burden of another,

God, give me love, and care, and strength
To help my toiling brother."

Both Anne and Carroll were somewhat silent as they mingled with the rather shabbily-dressed little crowd that came slowly out of the dimly-lit church.

"We have never been in a church together before," said Anne, as they turned into a quiet lane connecting two of the broader thoroughfares.

"No," he answered. "Personally, I have not been in a church for years."

"I sometimes go," Anne went on. "Especially when I am lonely or unhappy."

"And are you often lonely and unhappy?" he asked, looking down at her with grave, tender eyes.

"Sometimes," she answered. "It is curious," she added, "how our devoutness seems at its zenith when we are most miserable. Mrs. Browning knew that when she wrote —

"'But woe being come, the soul is dumb
That crieth not on God.'"

"I don't know," said her companion. "I should think happiness would be more conducive to a devout state of mind than misery. It ought to be."

"Yes, I know. It is mean to neglect a friend until we want some favor of him. But that is how one usually treats one's God, I'm afraid. 'When other helpers fail,' the old hymn says, you remember."

"Human nature is pretty mean, take it all round," observed Carroll.

"I don't think you could be accused of meanness, Brian," said Anne, not knowing how his heart jumped at her unconscious use of his name for the first time since their broken engagement. "I think there are few sons or brothers who would have borne what you have borne during the last ——"

But he interrupted her.

"My dear Anne, that has nothing to do with the subject in hand. It is all over and done with. It was the only thing to do, and couldn't be avoided." Then he added: "You are beginning to look pale and tired. I think you have walked far enough. There are no cabs to be seen, so let us take this omnibus until we get into more civilized regions."

CHAPTER XXII

"But, my dear Anne," exclaimed Frances Charteris, a couple of days later, in an ascending ripple of amazement, "do you mean to tell me that you are not going to marry him, after all?"

"I am not going to marry him, after all," was the calm answer. "But we are very good friends, and I hope we shall remain so."

"But how very extraordinary!" went on Frances, with round, astonished eyes. "When the man was a suspected nobody, you seemed to adore him, and absolutely to flaunt your engagement in people's faces. And now, when everything is cleared up, and he is something of a hero, you calmly break off everything, and seem quite contented."

"Perhaps he broke it off," said Anne, with a cryptic smile.

"He — oh, nonsense!" answered the other sharply. "The man was madly in love with you. I saw you together once or twice, and his eyes looked — oh, well, anyone could see."

"He may not be in love with me now," smiled Anne.

"I don't think he looks like a man who would change," said Frances. "I dare say you have broken his heart. You are so pretty, Anne, and when you don't look naughty, you look so good. And men with those dark gray eyes are always so impressionable."

Anne smiled again, but did not speak.

"By the way," went on Frances, "I'm afraid I shall have to get rid of Mademoiselle de Cornay. She absolutely makes love to Alfred before my very eyes. And Eric, poor boy, is simply mad about her."

"I don't like her," said Anne. "She has come in once or twice with Elfie, and patronized me in such a pronounced way that I have felt inclined to take her by the shoulders and put her out upon the doormat. Nevertheless, she is rather pretty, and her figure is perfect."

"Yes, I know. But that makes me all the more determined that I have had enough of her. And Elfie is getting quite pert and saucy, and lately has taken to rolling her eyes just as Mademoiselle does. She is so different from dear old Miss Fanshawe, who was so respectful and dowdy, with no complexion to speak of, and a nice shapeless figure, like one of those long sofa-cushions. She was so safe. She had no more idea of putting on her clothes than a Dutch doll. Now Lalage de Cornay's clothes always make

you imagine how she would look with no clothes on at all. Directoire gowns are all very well. But there are two ways of wearing them, and one is the decent way, and the other — isn't."

"Yes, I know what you mean," assented Anne.

"It is positively sickening to see her undulating about on the piano-stool," exclaimed Frances, after a brief pause, "with Alfred on one side fanning her, and Eric on the other side, looking nothing less than moonstruck. Oh, I'm fed up with Mademoiselle de Cornay. And what do you think? She finds fault with my French — before Elfie too, and keeps saying: 'But no, dear madame, that is not how we say in France.' But when Alfred or Eric makes the most appalling hay of her language, both in grammar and idiom, she throws up her hands, and says: 'But it is marvellous how monsieur speaks the French. When I listen, I can with difficulty believe that monsieur is indeed an Englishman.' Oh, it is all very well to laugh, Anne, but you wouldn't like it yourself. And Alfred's latest fad is to speak nothing but French — or what he calls French — and it makes cab-drivers and bus-conductors so rude. And none of the servants understand it, and, of course, you can't expect them to obey orders shouted at them in a language that conveys nothing to them."

"Well, I should get rid of her," said Anne, with the air of finality with which one engineers the affairs of one's friends.

"Oh, I mean to. At least, I mean to try. But very likely if I do she will marry poor Eric out of sheer revenge. Or else she will try to make mischief between Alfred and me. She is a horrid serpent, and I wish I had never seen her. It is a good thing for you that your friend Brian has gone back to Eaton Place, or she would have been making eyes at him every time she met him on the stairs."

"You poor thing!" Anne said affectionately. "You are always in trouble, aren't you?"

"I am indeed. I'm sure I hope it will be made up to me in another world. For I have had no end of worries in this one. Oh, there's a ring. Perhaps it is your friend Brian."

It was not Brian, however, but a tall, military-looking old man, who looked down at Anne with Brian's eyes and Brian's smile.

"I think you must be Miss Stafford," he said, with a far-away echo of Brian's voice in his rather gruff tones.

"Yes," she answered, looking at him with whitening cheeks and scared eyes. "And you, I think, must be Sir John Carroll, are you not? Has anything happened?" she added, her voice trembling. "Is he — ill?"

"I am Brian Carroll's father," the old man said in a kind, reassuring voice: "And my son is quite well." Then he followed Anne into the sitting-room, where she introduced him to Frances.

The latter did not stay long, and when she had gone, Sir John said, seating himself in Brian's chair:

"My son does not know that I have done myself the honor of visiting you to-day. We have spoken of you a good deal. And — well, in short, I felt I should like to know you."

"It was very nice of you," Anne said, somewhat conventionally.

"No — no," her visitor answered, with a wave of his hand. "I wanted to see for myself the girl who had won my son's regard."

No suitable answer occurred to Anne. Therefore she made none.

"My son," went on Brian's father, in rather a stern voice, "is an exceptional — a very exceptional — character. I believe — and I have every reason for believing — that his wife will be a very happy woman."

Then, as Anne did not speak, he continued:

"I am an old man, Miss Stafford, and I may perhaps say things that in a younger man might seem presuming. So I want to ask you if there is any reason why you should not renew your

engagement with my son? He has had a hard time for the last year or so, as I dare say you may imagine. And he is feeling this last blow very keenly, I can see; though, of course, he doesn't speak of it. And I am vexed for the lad; and I feel that in a way I am to blame for the horrible suspicions that have rested on him so long, and that I ought to have believed in him — when I didn't. So I want you to help me to make it up to him. You are not entirely indifferent to him, I know."

"What makes you think so?" flashed out Anne.

"My dear young lady, the look upon your face told me so when you opened the door — when you feared that perhaps my sudden coming meant that Brian was ill, or that something had happened to him."

Anne flushed deeply, then grew pale again. For what Sir John said was quite true. When she had realized that it was Brian's father who had unexpectedly come to her, for a few terrible seconds her heart had been in the grip of a sick dread that he might be the herald of some evil — even of death.

"Has your son sent you to me as his ambassador?" she said slowly.

"I think you have forgotten that I told you when I first came in that he was unaware of my

visit," he replied, with a note of reproof in his courteous tone.

"Ah, yes — I forgot. I beg your pardon."

Then all at once her face changed, and her dark eyes grew dim and misty.

"Oh, Sir John," she faltered, "I don't want to be unloving or cruel — but I can't help it. I did love Brian. I would have died for him — but oh, that is a weak, idiotic thing to say. I would have been his wife whatever he had been accused of. Even if he had been guilty, I believe I could have married him and been happy. But — we had a misunderstanding, and I — well, I have a temper, and Brian was vexed ——"

"Yes, yes, I understand," said the old man soothingly.

Anne's head was resting on her hand as she leaned her elbow on the window-sill, and though she did not know it, great tears were dropping down upon her lap.

But Sir John saw them, though the dusk was creeping into the room, for his old eyes were keen.

"And then," went on the sad, sweet little voice, "I kept waiting and hoping that he would come back. Oh, those days and weeks — they seemed like years. And at last he came; and as some evil fate would have it, I was not alone. A man, a friend of Brian's, whom I knew, and

who had been always friendly and nice to me, had come in — only to wait for Brian — and Brian was furious, though he said nothing, and he went out without a word."

"Hot-headed young fool!" muttered Sir John, under his breath. "Now, now, my dear, don't cry. You'll only make your eyes red. Don't fret; it will all come right."

But Anne shook her head drearily, and after a pause went on in a low voice:

"Then — he went away. I saw Lady Carroll's death in a newspaper. And then I heard that he had shut up the flat. It seemed — that he had gone out of my life altogether."

She paused, and shivered slightly.

"Well, well, he hasn't gone out of your life — far from it," said Sir John, leaning towards her, and patting her shoulder in fatherly fashion. "You've had a quarrel — well, that's nothing. Brian has the devil's own temper — so have I. So have you, my dear, or I'm very much mistaken. Make it up — there's a good child. Let the lad come and see you, and speak for himself."

"Oh, but you don't understand," she answered wearily. "He has been to see me, and we are quite good friends; but — I have told him that I cannot marry him."

"Cannot marry him! God bless my soul,

child, why not? You can't deny you care for him — I shouldn't believe you if you did. And if ever a man was in love, he is. Why can't you marry him?"

"I don't know. I — we are only going to be friends," she faltered.

"Friends!" echoed her would-be father-in-law. "Pooh! — piece of absurd nonsense. There's no such thing as friendship between a handsome young woman and a finely set-up young fellow like my Brian. It's not nature. And how does Brian like being friends with the girl he wants to marry — eh?"

Anne began to laugh and cry together, like a mid-Victorian heroine.

"Oh, well — of course, he — doesn't like it. But — oh, Sir John, I can't help it. My heart seems cold and hard — as if it were dead ——"

"Pooh, pooh! Fiddlesticks! Rubbish! Never heard such nonsense in my life. Your heart dead, forsooth! I'll warrant Brian'll manage to bring it to life again — or he isn't the man his father was. There," he added, as a peremptory summons came to the door, "I'll bet a sovereign that's the lad himself — and in a mood to stand no shilly-shallying. Run and let him in, and then I'll be off."

Anne rose slowly. She knew it was not Brian's ring. Nor was it. It was no less a person-

age than Mrs. Hargrave, her uninviting face wreathed in smiles.

"Well, my dear, here I am at last," she said, to the astonished Anne, giving her a playful little shake. "I hope you have not thought me unkind in leaving you uncalled upon for so long. But——"

"I should have been very much surprised if you had called upon me," answered Anne, admitting her unwelcome visitor with evident reluctance. "You have forgotten, I think, that you have cut me dead several times of late."

"What!—cut you!" exclaimed Mrs. Hargrave in a dismayed voice. "Oh, my poor eyes—I really must have them seen to. But, of course, you ought to have known, you naughty girl, that it was a mistake."

Anne smiled icily, and as they were now in the sitting-room, introduced Sir John.

"How do you do," said the lady effusively, adding up a little sum of two and two with surprising rapidity. "This is indeed a pleasure. Your dear son is not quite unknown to me. We have missed him sadly since he left. He is, in truth, a son to be proud of."

Anne listened in cold amazement. Sir John bowed courteously, and thanked the speaker for her expressions of regard for his son.

"We shall have a double loss when he carries

off our sweet young neighbor," continued Mrs. Hargrave, wagging her head playfully at Anne.

Sir John looked puzzled for a second or two, and surveyed the smiling lady with gentlemanly curiosity. Then a sudden twinkle came into his kind old eyes, and he settled himself more comfortably in his chair, while Mrs. Hargrave said:

"I have always felt singularly drawn towards your son, and have often wished to know him. But I am naturally of a very retiring disposition, and, of course, a widow, living quite alone, as I do, has to be very careful."

Sir John intimated that he quite understood the desirability for extreme prudence in such a case, and Mrs. Hargrave went on:

"At first, I'm afraid I had to scold this dear girl a little, owing to the extreme friendliness between her and your dear son. One knows what young men are. For, of course, you have been a young man yourself, dear Sir John."

Sir John admitted that he had at one time, been much younger than he was at present.

"But only a few days ago," resumed Mrs. Hargrave, "I heard from Mrs. Charteris that the dear young people were definitely engaged, though the happy day is as yet unfixed. I am, however, very chary of believing reports, even when repeated by friends. But your presence

is 'confirmation strong as Holy Writ' — to quote wonderful old Shakespeare. And I am sure they will be a most happy and devoted couple."

Anne had sat in speechless anger and mortification during the above remarks; but now she exclaimed:

"You are quite mistaken, Mrs. Hargrave. Mr. Carroll and I ——"

But Sir John interrupted her.

"One moment, my dear Anne — one moment." Then he said, turning to Mrs. Hargrave: "I thank you very much for your kind wishes, Mrs. Hargrave. I should be indeed pleased if the wedding could take place to-morrow. Miss Stafford in every way fulfils my expectations of all that my son's wife ought to be. However, she prefers a somewhat long engagement, I am sorry to say, and insists that the wedding shall not take place until after my son's return from a somewhat lengthened sojourn abroad with his friend Mr. Musgrave."

"Ah, well," smiled Mrs. Hargrave, "there is plenty of time for our little Anne. And when does your son start, Sir John? — and how long will he remain abroad?"

"He will go some time next week, I believe," answered the old gentleman, as he rose to go. "As for how long they may remain — I dare

say they will find big game enough to occupy them for the next three years."

He was not looking directly at Anne as he made the supposititious statement, but he knew that she lost color somewhat, and half rose from her chair.

"Three years!" echoed Mrs. Hargrave. "That seems a long time, surely."

"It is Miss Stafford's wish," said Sir John, looking down affectionately at a rather pale and trembling Anne. "So my son and I, who are her devoted subjects, must put our own wishes in the background, and give way. Now, my dear Anne, I must go. Good-afternoon, madame," he added, bowing in stately fashion to Mrs. Hargrave.

As Anne went with him to the hall-door, he said in an undertone:

"I have heard from Brian of that lady. She must not be allowed to make her evil tongue busy with your name, my dear, so I took the liberty of assuming that your engagement still held good, for which I am sure you will forgive me. Well, good-by, Anne. I am sorry I am not to be allowed to welcome you as my daughter-in-law. But it can't be helped."

But Anne laid her hand on his arm, and said, in an almost inaudible voice:

"I — Brian told me that he had thought of

going to India — but — I don't know why — I thought he had given up the idea. Are you — are you quite sure he is going next week, and that he — oh, surely he won't stay away for three years! It is such a long, weary time to miss a — a friend ——"

Her voice trailed off into silence.

Sir John carefully concealed his satisfaction at this mournful little protest, and replied, shaking his handsome old head:

"The lad will take his own way, my child. As I told you, platonic affection is not what he feels towards you — however you may feel towards him. So he will be happier away from you, than philandering about as your friend. But I am sure he will either come to say good-by or write. I'll tell him I've seen you. Good-by; you must let me come and see you another day."

Anne listened to the echo of his footsteps until they died away. Then she went back to Mrs. Hargrave.

She never could remember afterwards what that lady said, or how she herself answered.

She knew that she was kissed and embraced, much against her will, and dimly recalled such expressions as: "Naughty — naughty — to send away that dear boy for so long!" "Most aristocratic old man, Sir John." "Evidently devoted to you, my love," etc.

Then, at last, Mrs. Hargrave rustled off, and Anne was left alone in the swiftly darkening room.

Three years! Three years! Her heart seemed to echo the words unceasingly. How could she bear it? Three years! It seemed an eternity.

For the second time in her life she realized that she had deliberately flung away her own happiness.

"Oh God! what shall I do?" she muttered, as she pressed her head down on her clasped hands. "Oh God — help me — in some way help me!"

Then for a time she sat very, very still.

The room grew quite dark, but Anne did not move. A moaning wind had risen, and heavy rain-drops pattered against the window. The hall-door banged softly at irregular intervals. Mrs. Hargrave must have left it unlatched. Anne half rose to shut it, then sank back in her chair again. What did it matter? she thought wearily. What did anything matter?

Presently a series of sharp barks rang through the room, and Boxer's cold nose was pushed into her hand. He had often paid her a visit since Carroll left the flat, for Boxer was not a dog who forgot old friends. Anne bent down and laid her cheek on his rough head.

"Dear old Boxer!" she murmured, with a

laugh that was half a sob. "You at least are faithful. Dear old boy!"

Boxer wagged his tail furiously, barked again, licked Anne's face, and then deliberately upset the waste-paper basket, from which he always hoped to unearth imaginary mice.

As he scratched wildly among the papers, Anne rose to light the lamp. She had just found the matches, when someone took them from her hand, and Brian's voice said:

"Let me do that, Anne."

Anne uttered a little uncertain cry.

"Oh — it is you — it is you!" she exclaimed. "You — you have come to say good-by — have you not?"

He seated himself on the sofa, and drew Anne down beside him. Then he flung the matches on the table, and said quietly:

"After all, it is light enough — to say good-by."

Anne was silent.

"You are trembling," Brian went on, taking both hands. "Why are you? Don't you want to say good-by? Three years will soon pass, Anne. My father says he has been to see you," he added, as she still did not speak. "I met him just as I was leaving the house. You have taken his heart by storm, little Anne. He has quite fallen in love with you."

"Brian," Anne said, making a desperate effort to speak quite calmly and collectedly, "why must you go? You said we were to be friends — as we used to be. Have you forgotten? How can we be friends if you are so far away, and I am all alone here?"

"I have not forgotten, Anne. But I have changed my mind. I no longer care to be your friend. Therefore, I am going away. When I have got myself into a strictly friendly frame of mind, I shall come back again."

Again there was a silence, only broken for a time by Boxer's wild researches in the waste-paper basket.

"When friends say good-by," went on Brian — "friends such as you and I have been, a certain latitude is allowed as to the manner in which their farewells are made. In our case the latitude is even wider than usual. You must remember, dear, that we once hoped to be husband and wife. Therefore, Anne, may I say good-night to you — good-by to you — as I used to do when I looked upon you as my wife to be?"

"Yes," she whispered, with trembling lips.

Then in an instant his arms were round her, and his lips on hers.

And with a queer little cry she flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him back again.

"Brian — Brian — don't go! Don't leave me!" she cried despairingly.

"I must go," he answered, in an inflexible voice that made her heart sink. "Only one thing could prevent my going." Then he added, very tenderly: "I wonder if by any chance you can guess what that one thing might be, Anne?"

She shook her head, and buried her face in his neck.

"Think again," he said, stroking her hair gently back from her forehead. "Think again."

"Oh, I can't think," she answered miserably. "How can I, when I am going to lose my best friend?"

Brian suddenly kissed her again.

"Annie," he said, "are you quite sure you don't love me — as much as I love you?"

She moved uneasily.

"How can I tell?" she answered. "I don't even know if you love me at all now."

"Don't you?" he said, holding her more closely. "Then, my dearest, will you let me spend the rest of my life in proving to you that I do?"

Here Boxer, with a joyous yelp, found to his exceeding joy that there really was a mouse in the waste-paper basket, so he promptly killed it, and laid it, in triumph, close to his master's feet.

But to his disappointment and chagrin Carroll

did not say as usual: "Good dog — clever dog." He only said in a tone that Boxer did not remember him to have used to him before:

"Shall I tell you something, you provoking, wayward Anne? You have loved me all the time."

Boxer made no remark, but carried the mouse out into the hall and left it there.

THE END.

Screening